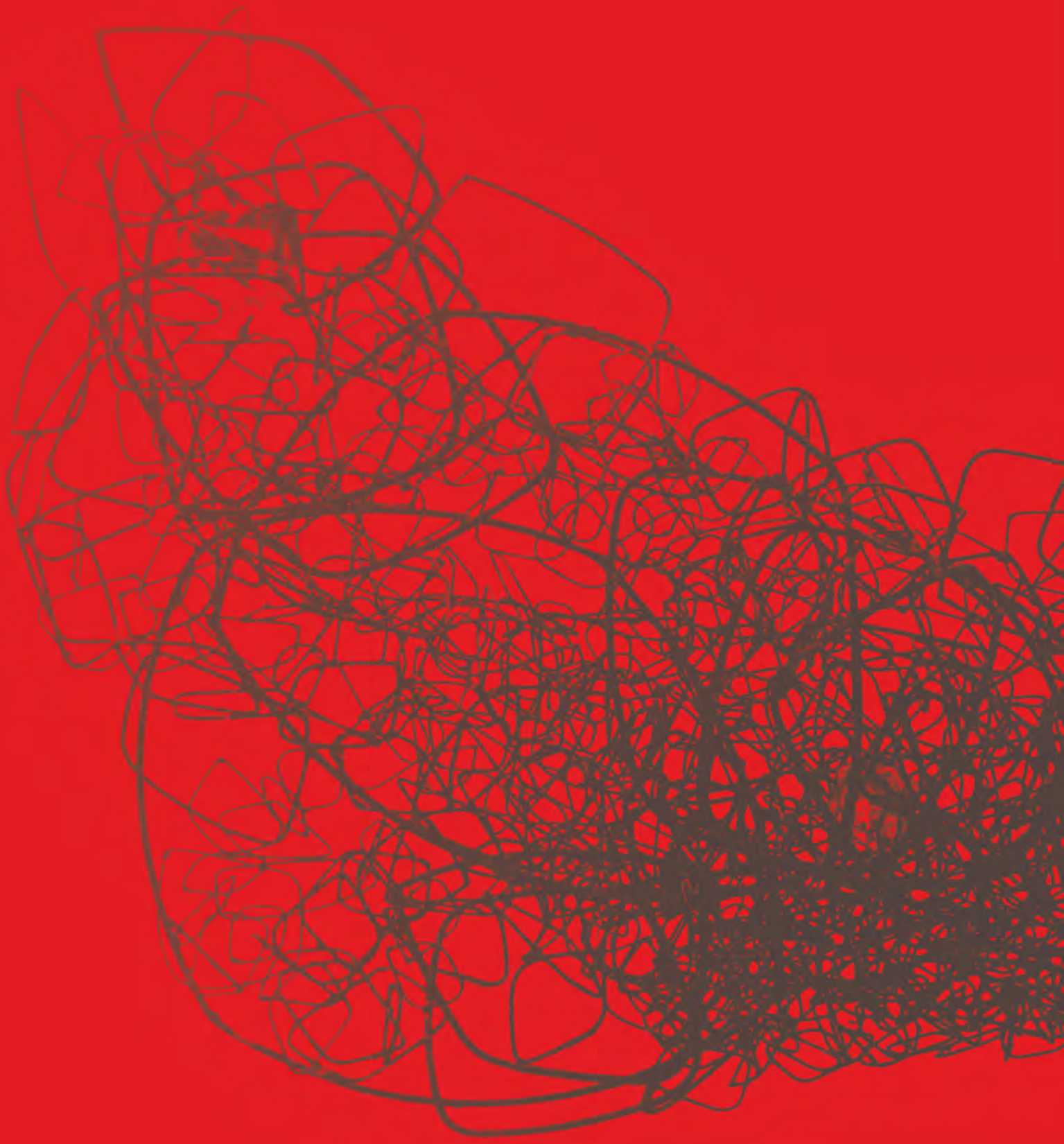
# CLAIRE FALKENSTEIN BEYOND SCULPTURE

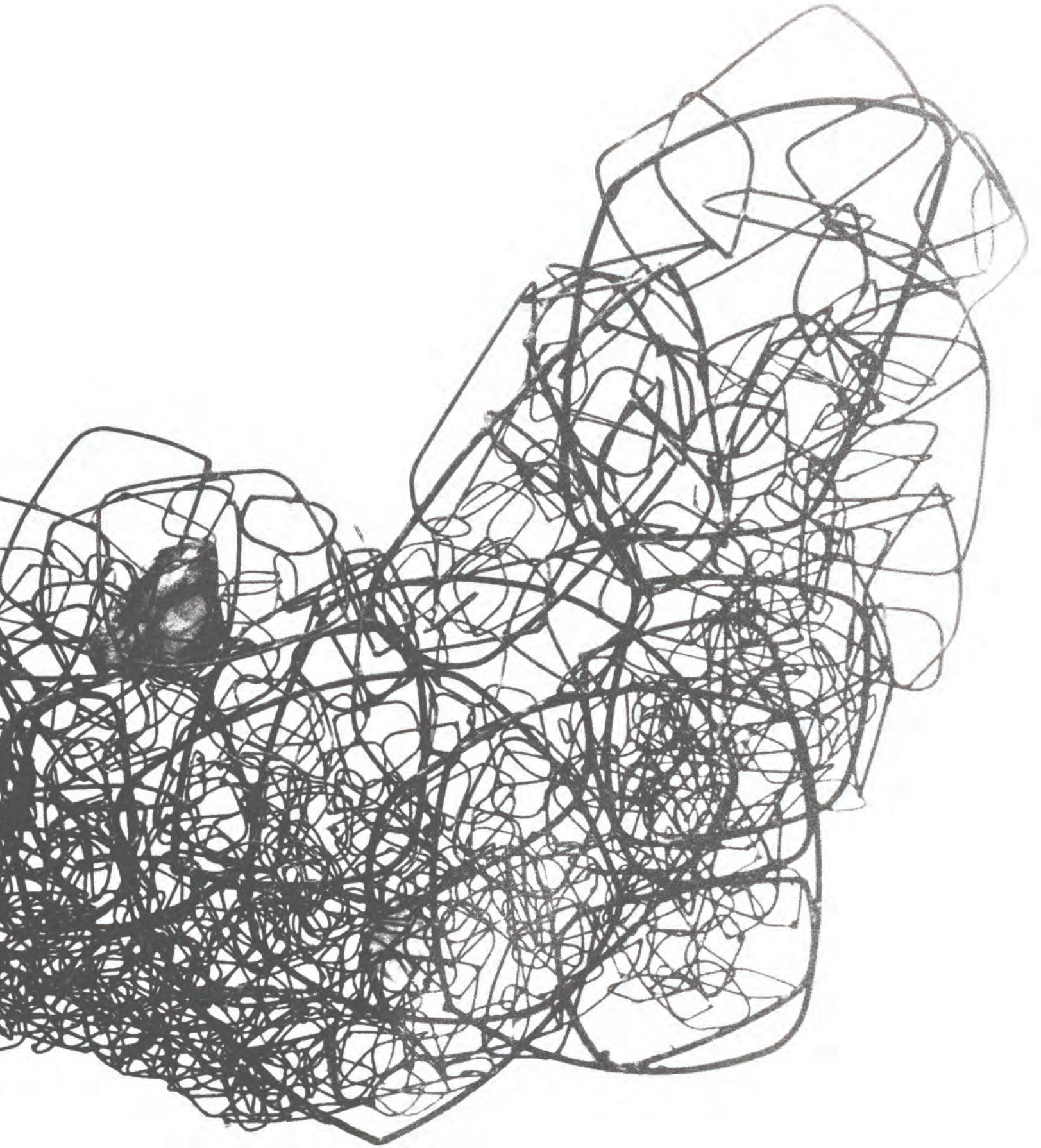
JAY BELLOLI

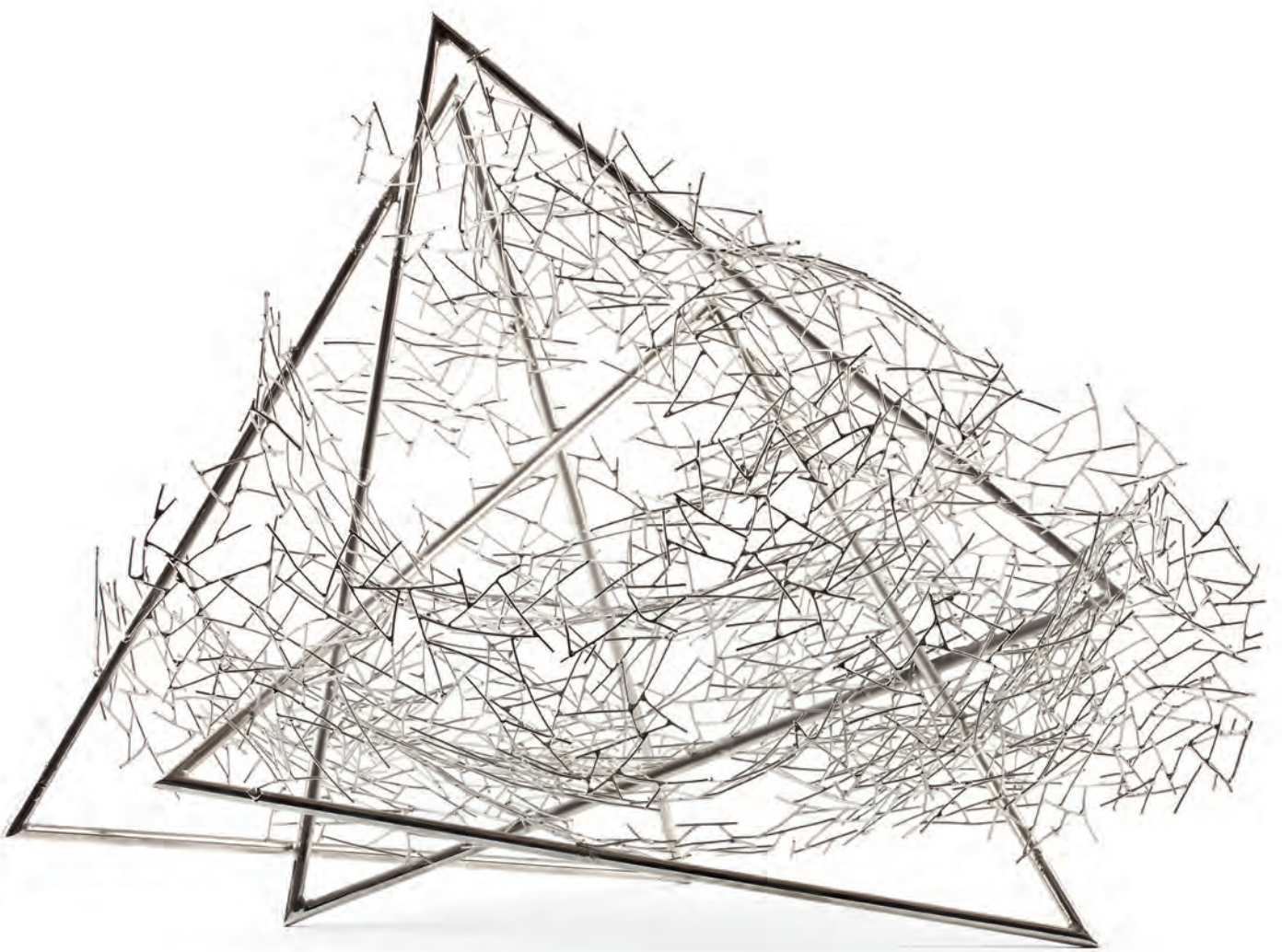
WITH AN ESSAY BY

MAREN HENDERSON

PASADENA MUSEUM OF CALIFORNIA ART







# CLAIRE FALKENSTEIN
# BEYOND SCULPTURE

JAY BELLOLI

WITH AN ESSAY BY
MAREN HENDERSON

PASADENA MUSEUM OF CALIFORNIA ART

This catalogue is published on the occasion of the exhibition *Claire Falkenstein: Beyond Sculpture*, organized by the Pasadena Museum of California Art and curated by Jay Belloli.

Exhibition itinerary:

**Pasadena Museum of California Art**
April 17–September 11, 2016

**Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento**
October 2–December 31, 2016

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FRONT AND BACK COVERS: Predator, **1963–64 (open and closed).**
See page 45.
INSIDE FRONT AND BACK COVERS: Fire Screen, **1962.**
See pages 8–9.

Unless otherwise noted, works of art are from the collection of The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York.

PAGE 2 Space Structure, **or** Interpenetrating Triangles, **1978. Nickel-plated iron, 47 × 35 × 25 inches.**
OPPOSITE Structure and Flow, **ca. 1957–61. Copper tubing, 26¾ × 36 × 24½ inches.**

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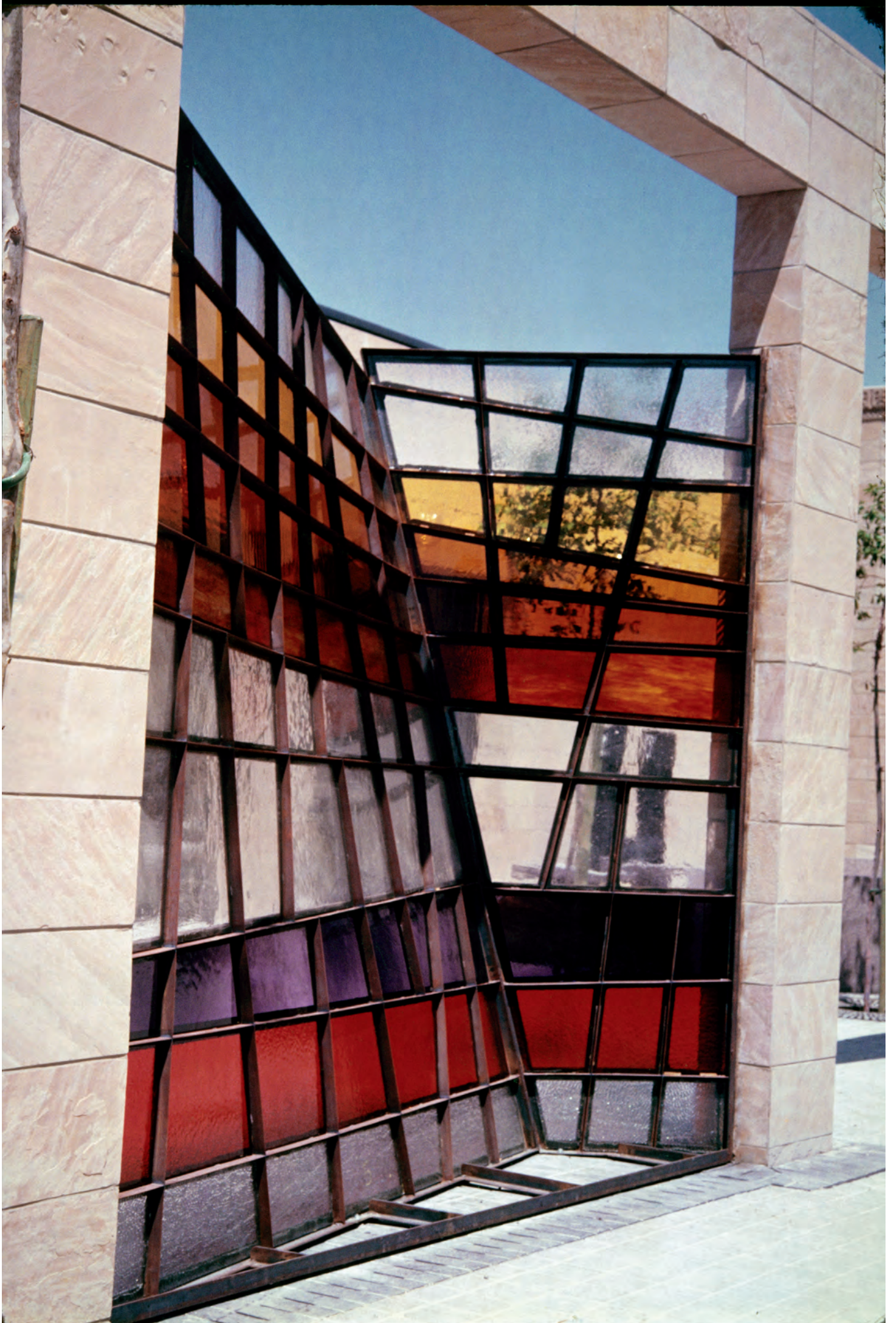
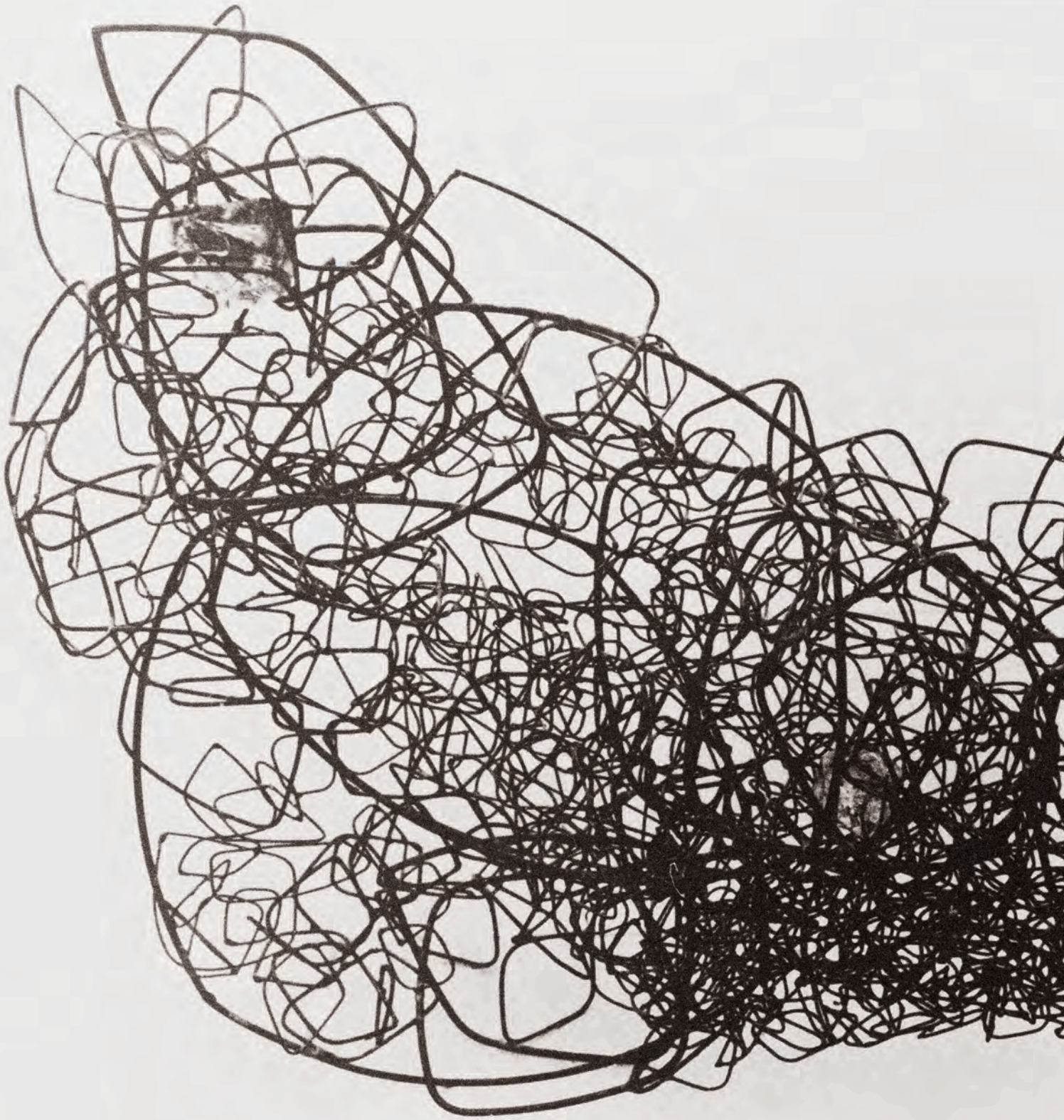




Fire Screen, **1962. Steel, Venetian glass; 36 × 60 × 132 inches.** Collection of Baronne Alix de Rothschild, Reux, France.

# FOREWORD

**Responding to the need for exhibitions and scholarship dedicated to both contemporary and historical art from California, the Pasadena Museum of California Art (PMCA) was established as a space to explore the cultural dynamics and influences that make California—and its art and artists—unique.**

To that end, the PMCA is proud to present *Claire Falkenstein: Beyond Sculpture*. As the title suggests, the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue highlight not only the sculpture for which Claire Falkenstein (1908–1997) is best known but also her paintings, drawings, etchings, lithographs, jewelry, glass, and watercolors, which have not been seen together in a major museum exhibition. With *Beyond Sculpture*, the PMCA is able to elaborate on the narrative of California art, including the full oeuvre of this significant female artist whose daring and intellectual rigor are manifested in her works. The PMCA is indebted to curator Jay Belloli, an expert on Falkenstein's art and a contemporary art curator with more than forty years of experience, for spearheading the exhibition and for contributing a substantial essay to this catalogue.

Falkenstein's work was influenced by the state and specifically the cities—San Francisco and Los Angeles—in which she spent much of her life, and her work imparted the essence of California culture to a broad audience. Though she worked mostly in California, Falkenstein was equally well known outside the state. She was part of a wave of American artists who moved to Paris in the years following World War II. She lived there for more than a decade, traveling throughout Europe and producing some of her most important works. Her art is included in major collections in both the United States and Europe.

Vase for 3**, ca. 1950s. Glass, 16 × 13 × 11 inches.**

One of Falkenstein's major commissions during her years in Europe was the entrance gates to Peggy Guggenheim's museum-palazzo in Venice, Italy (1961). The museum, now known as the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, has played a crucial role in expanding the reach of this exhibition by including Jay Belloli and the art historian and Falkenstein authority Maren Henderson in programs at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in January 2016.

The PMCA is sincerely thankful to The Falkenstein Foundation for its loans to the exhibition and for facilitating research. Without its efforts the museum would not be able to present such a dynamic and informative exhibition. In addition, the museum is grateful to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Arts Commission, The Pasadena Arts & Culture Commission and the City of Pasadena Cultural Affairs Division, the Pasadena Art Alliance, and the Southern California Committee of the National Museum of Women in the Arts for underwriting this exhibition and catalogue as well as for their continued support of the PMCA. We are also obliged to Kim and Al Eiber; the Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York; and the California Art Company, LLC, for their support and for recognizing the importance of this project.

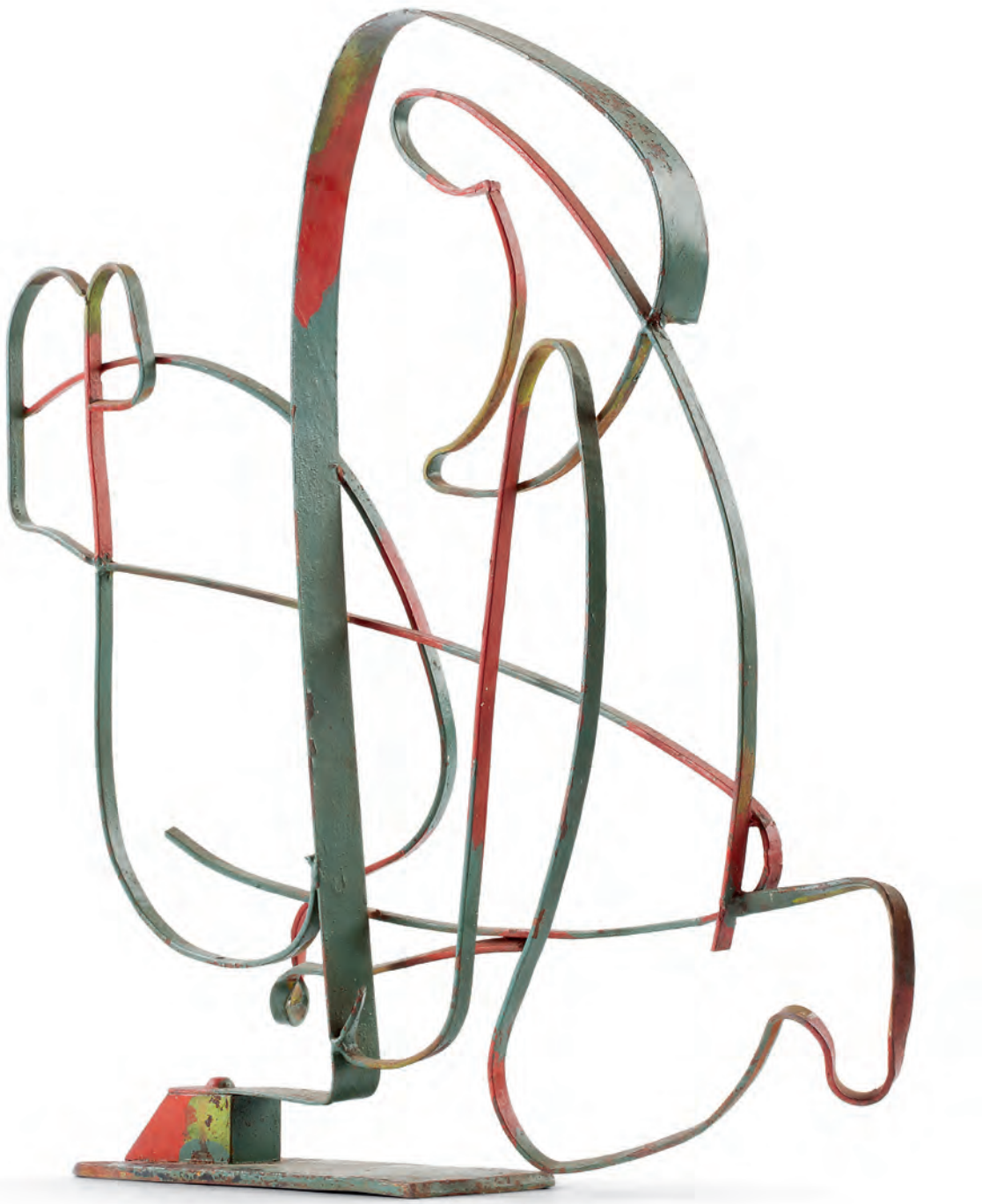
We are indebted to the lenders to the exhibition, who have made it

possible for us to present a rich and varied selection of Falkenstein's work: The Falkenstein Foundation; Sandy and Adrea Bettelman; Kim and Al Eiber; Jack and Mary Lou Rutberg; Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York; the Oakland Museum of California; the Palm Springs Art Museum; and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC.

We thank Jay Belloli and Maren Henderson for writing scholarly essays for this catalogue that provide important insights into Falkenstein's life and work in California and Europe. Additionally, the PMCA acknowledges the editor of this catalogue, Karen Jacobson, and the catalogue designer, Gail Swanlund, for their contributions to the presentation of Falkenstein's legacy. Finally I thank the PMCA's board of directors, Ambassador Circle, and staff for their enduring commitment to the museum and to California art.

With *Claire Falkenstein: Beyond Sculpture*, the PMCA takes another step in exploring the full breadth of California art. Falkenstein was one of this country's most experimental and productive artists, one who relentlessly explored new mediums, techniques, and processes. I leave you to read about and examine the dazzling range of her works and, in doing so, to further immerse yourself in the richness and depth of California art.

Jenkins Shannon
Executive Director
Pasadena Museum of California Art



**One of the things about my work now which remains is this sense of nature and natural phenomena, which I feel is one of the prime movers of my work.**

**I'm working with motion all the time.**

**If you're unwilling to … go into the unknown and fail, you'll never do anything.**

CLAIRE FALKENSTEIN

# CLAIRE FALKENSTEIN: NATURE, MOTION, INNOVATION

Jay Belloli

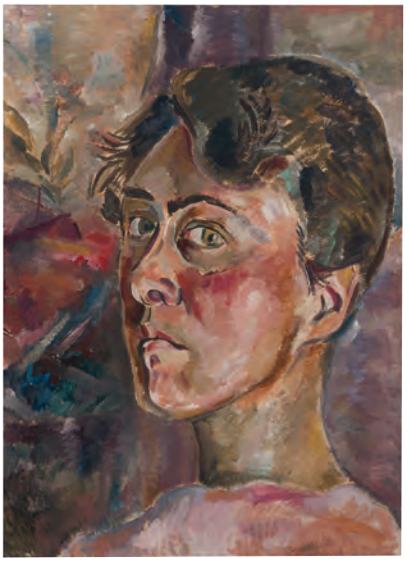
Epigraphs: Falkenstein, in "Claire Falkenstein: Oral History Transcript," interview conducted by Marjorie Rogers (Los Angeles: Oral History Program, University of California, 1982), 3; hereafter cited as UCLA oral history. Falkenstein, in oral history interview with Claire Falkenstein, conducted by Paul Karlstrom, March 2–21, 1995, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 35; hereafter cited as AAA oral history. Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 239.

**Themes of nature, motion, and innovation were central to Claire Falkenstein's art throughout her career.** For her these were complex ideas. Nature was the **"verdure of Oregon,"** especially the abundant environments of the coastline and forests of Coos Bay, where she was born and spent her first twelve years.[1] When Falkenstein became an artist, she came to believe that **"the work of art … is not nature … it's an extension of nature."**[2] And she was completely aware of the largest idea of nature, **"the Einsteinian attitude of the expanding universe."** For her, this connected to an idea of **"total space, … you do not make something to displace space but whatever you do is part of space."**[3]

A sense of movement is almost always present in Falkenstein's sculptures, paintings, and works in other mediums. From the 1940s through the 1970s she also created a number of specific sculptures or commissions that incorporate physical movement. There was also the motion of her creative process; she never looked at a previous sculpture or painting when she began the next, even if the new piece belonged to the same body of work. As a result it was easier for her to take creative risks and explore entirely new forms or materials. Thus experimentation and innovation

1. Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 3.
2. Ibid., 130.
3. Ibid., 189.

Game, **1944. Forged and painted iron, 21 × 20 ¾ × 3 inches.**



are evident in works made throughout her career. There was a false start from time to time, but as she said, **"in the long run, it isn't a false start, because what your failures are, are feelers into something that will come off, maybe not that way but in another way.… This is part of the business of being creative."**[4] And her work was likely shaped, perhaps unconsciously, by the peripatetic nature of her artistic career. She moved from the San Francisco Bay Area to Paris, with several trips back to Northern California, also spending significant time in Italy, establishing a studio in New York, and finally settling in the Venice section of Los Angeles, appropriately living next to the ocean, just as she had when she was a child.

It is clear that visual expression was always central to Falkenstein's life, even during her childhood in Coos Bay. As she said in a late interview, **"I've always drawn, all of my life, from the time I was seven."**[5] Her father was the manager of a lumber mill, and the owner of the mill had a collection of paintings, sculptures, and other beautiful objects in his house at Shore Acres.[6] **"When I was a child … people would say, … 'what do you want to do when you grow up?' … I said, 'I want to be a sculptor.' … And I don't know where it came from—it may have been from the things I had seen at Shore Acres, or maybe just the coast, the rock formations or the trees.… I must have gotten**

4. **Ibid., 239.**

5. **Falkenstein, in AAA oral history, 32.**

6. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 8.**

Self Portrait: Skeptical at Nineteen, **1927–28. Oil on canvas, 28 ½ × 22 inches.**
Lumber Mill, **1938. Oil on canvas, 26 × 36 inches.**

**the word someplace that there was such a thing as sculpture."**[7] Her mother was also a strong influence, not only in raising her but also in the environment that she created at home: **"it was open and had a sense of space."**[8] There was, however, no direction for Falkenstein's artistic interests: **"Everything was on my own; I had no guidance. I remember doing modeling and doing mud things, but they were clay, because [in Coos Bay] there's a lot of clay and a lot of sand."**[9]

In 1920, when Falkenstein was twelve, the family moved to the verdant urban environment of Berkeley, and she was ultimately enrolled in the private and academically excellent Anna Head School, where she pursued her interest in art. For college she went to the nearby University of California, Berkeley, where she majored in art and minored in anthropology and philosophy. Anthropology awakened her to the world.[10] Her studies in philosophy made her **"open and unafraid to tackle difficult texts,"** including reading Jung and Freud.[11] She learned a significant amount about art history. But studio art instruction at Berkeley was extremely traditional in the late 1920s, and it did not engage her on a deep level. Unexpectedly in her junior year the American artist George Lusk came from Paris to teach life drawing.[12] He had been working with the French artist André Lhôte there and had the Parisian attitude toward art, **"toward space, toward pattern, toward control of … two-dimensional, three-dimensional form, in a personal way."**[13] He told Falkenstein, "Look within," not a typical comment in the art department at Berkeley at the time: **"I thought, 'Oh my God, he's given me freedom.' And from that first day … I treated the model as a point of departure."**[14]

As she reflected decades later, **"Those drawings have now become my own mentor. They were drawings of such passion and expression of motion."**[15] On another occasion she said, **"What happened to me at that time became an unconscious drive for individual proportion … and I wasn't abiding by any rules at all."**[16]

7. **Ibid., 33.**
8. **Ibid., 4.**
9. **Ibid., 9.**
10. **Ibid., 280.**
11. **Ibid., 39.**
12. **Falkenstein, in AAA oral history, 4.**
13. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 17.**
14. **Falkenstein, in AAA oral history, 4.**
15. **Ibid.**
16. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 19.**

Crouching Figure, **1939. Ceramic, burnished oxides; 8 ½ × 7 × 6 ½ inches.**

Blue Figure, **1940. Carved and painted wood, 30 ¾ × 9 × 9 inches.** Collection of Sandy and Adrea Bettelman, Los Angeles.

Aside from the fixed stare resulting from looking in a mirror to create the painting, her *Self Portrait: Skeptical at Nineteen* (1927–28; p. 14), probably completed in her junior year, is untraditional, particularly in the simplification of the forms of her head and neck. And the profusion of color in her face, neck, and blouse and in the background makes it remarkable for student work of that time. The emphasis on personal expression and simplification of forms that she learned at Berkeley informed many of her paintings from the 1930s. In *Lumber Mill* (1938; p. 14), using a subject she knew well because of her father's early career, she generalized the forms of the logs and created a space that is far from realistic.

When Falkenstein was still a student at Berkeley, she was given a grant to study with Alexander Archipenko at Mills College, in Oakland. **"For the first time I got into clay in a big way,"** she remembered, **"under a master."**[17] Archipenko often used faceted planes and negative space to create a new means of looking at the human figure. His influence on Falkenstein was significant because, by the early 1940s, when she created a number of major pieces in clay using slab construction, many of

17. **Ibid., 35.**

Wave, **1940. Terra-cotta with manganese dioxide, 14 × 15 × 10 inches.**

**"I didn't know what I was doing except I was using the medium in the way I thought it should be used. I was also … probably relating myself to some inner need, again, for motion."**[18]

*Blue Figure* (1940; opposite) was greatly influenced by the art of the Northwest Coast native cultures, which Falkenstein had probably learned about early in her life or in her studies in anthropology.[19] In *Wave* (above), however, completed the same year, she left the figure behind and evoked, in the visual motion of a curved geometry, a form associated with something she knew well, the ocean. Amazingly, she created an almost abstract ceramic sculpture nearly two decades before the work of Peter Voulkos and other California ceramists who employed abstract forms.

Soon after her graduation, in 1930, Falkenstein had an exhibition of her figure drawings at a gallery in San Francisco. The exhibition was prestigious enough that she was given a teaching position at the Anna Head School, where she worked for seven years.[20] Later she taught at Mills College, the University of California Extension, the San Francisco Museum of Art, and the California School of Fine Art (which later became the San Francisco Art Institute).[21] While she was at Mills,

them defined space more than they displaced it, and they were far from the traditional vessels that we associate with the ceramic medium. In fact, they were more radical than the work of her teacher. Composed of curved, intertwined, and edged forms that create interior spaces and suggest movement, *Crouching Figure* (1939; p. 15), for example, bears only a cursory resemblance to a human subject. As Falkenstein said,

18. **Ibid., 53.**

19. **Ibid., 353.**

20. **Ibid., 19, 25.**

21. **George Goodwin, introduction to UCLA oral history, x.**

Cellular, **1941. Oil on canvas with shaped frame, 15 ⅞ × 26 ¾ inches.** Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Rutberg.

she was invited to write for *Arts and Architecture*, the leading California-based arts journal at the time. This position gave her the opportunity to travel to Los Angeles and get acquainted with a city that she regarded as less parochial than the Bay Area.[22]

The extraordinary energy released during her junior year at Berkeley led Falkenstein to explore other arts during this period; she studied music, piano, singing, and musical composition. She wed her high school boyfriend, Richard McCarthy, who would become a successful lawyer. Given her consuming career as an artist, it was not a traditional marriage for the time. She had the **"instinctive feeling of wanting my independence, even when I married."**[23]

The contemporary art scene in San Francisco during those years was small and very localized. As Falkenstein remembered, **"Dr. Grace McCann Morley … was the most important integer in that period of art.… She was the first … director of the San Francisco Museum of Art, and she was the one to insist on a contemporary … attitude. She had gotten her doctorate at the Sorbonne.… She made it possible to exhibit. There was nothing else … there were two or three little galleries."**[24]

There were other influences in San Francisco during those years. The abstract surrealist Charles Howard was very much a presence, as were his brother the sculptor Robert Howard and his wife, the sculptor Adeline Kent, both of whom were supportive of Falkenstein's burgeoning career in art.[25] Her teaching at the California School of Fine Art led to important friendships with artists, including the abstract painter and assemblagist Clay Spohn and **"the most important leader in painting,"** Clyfford Still.[26] Richard Diebenkorn, who was younger, was also teaching there.

Falkenstein became the head of the Society of Women Artists in San Francisco, an organization that regularly mounted exhibitions. She knew well that women artists did not get the same opportunities and recognition that their male counterparts enjoyed, yet she felt that they had something unique to offer: **"I feel that women can contribute because of sensibility, … because they experience probably another facet of life."**[27] Her exposure to surrealist and abstract surrealist work in San Francisco led her to explore a similar direction in painting. In works such as *Yosemite* (also titled *Colorspace #3*; p. 76) and *Cellular* (opposite), both

22. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 27–28.**

23. **Ibid., 26.**

24. **Ibid., 30–31.**

25. **Ibid., 32.**

26. **Ibid.**

27. **Ibid., 179.**

Vigilante Victim II, **1940. Carved and painted redwood, 62 × 8 × 6 ¼ inches.**

from 1941, she created her own approach to this type of art. Aside from her effort to create visual space based on different hues, both works contain somewhat biomorphic forms that connect to specific aspects of nature.

Around 1940 Falkenstein began to work in wood. Affected by the lynchings of black men in the South, she created two vertical carved sculptures called *Vigilante Victim* (1940; left). She wrote that **"the polychromed surface … enhances the horror and despair one feels about such a barbarous act."**[28] Again, as in the wood sculpture *Blue Figure*, made around the same time, she subtly referenced her knowledge of the simplified forms and colors of Northwest Coast sculpture.

After the United States entered World War II, Falkenstein painted

murals in the British barracks and Letterman Hospital in San Francisco and in the Cow Palace, a training center for the US military. Her largest mural project, which she worked on from 1943 to 1945, was for the now destroyed navy psychiatric hospital in San Leandro (above). She created two large modernist murals, measuring about ten by ninety feet each, and two smaller murals, which were about ten by ten feet each.[29] The forms she used in the San Leandro murals helped her convey, with some abstraction, the destruction of the Allies' freighters and other ships in the early part of the war in the painting *Action in the North Atlantic #5* (1943; right).

During the 1940s Falkenstein continued her explorations in both sculpture and two-dimensional work. In wood pieces created with a band saw, such as *Rotation* (1942; p. 22), she made motion physical rather than formal, and space is also activated in the areas between the sections of wood. One could move any or all of the three attached sections for an almost unlimited number of configurations. Her wood sculpture *Interpenetration* (1944; p. 23) was a **"completely new idea of not making a rectangle but doing a shape for a wall piece."**[30] Two flat, nonrectilinear wood sections are attached by a piece of rope, which gives a sense of motion as it threads through holes of various sizes. The wood sections themselves have large cutout openings, again making space as well as solid material an aspect of the sculpture.

Falkenstein achieved a breakthrough in her sculpture in 1944 with the painted wrought-iron work *Game* (p. 12), which was her first experience with welding. In *Game*, the idea of line, which had been implicit in a number of her works, became explicit. The sculpture is in fact completely linear, with continuous curves that convey a strong sense of movement. And her use of color contrasts with the three-dimensional linear structure, making for a complex visual experience. She had gotten a craftsman to teach her welding, and she was ecstatic about her new technique and the result: **"I got into fire and into metal, and that was it."**[31] Soon after *Game*, from 1945 through 1948, she began to

28. **Falkenstein to Maren Henderson, July 12, 1989, cited in Henderson, "Sculpture," in *Claire Falkenstein* (Los Angeles: Falkenstein Foundation, 2012), 78.**

29. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 57.**

30. **Ibid., 63.**

31. **Ibid., 75, 76.**

LEFT Ideas of Growth and of Human Sensibilities, **ca. 1943. Mural for Theater of the US Naval Hospital, San Leandro, California (destroyed).**
RIGHT Action in the North Atlantic #5, **1943. Oil on canvas, 38 × 34 inches.**

Rotation, **1942. Mahogany wood cut with band saw; three pieces, 8 ¾ × 4 × 6 ¼ inches overall.**

Interpenetration, **1944. Wood, sisal rope; 33 × 62 × 4 inches.**

create sculptural jewelry (above). **"I treated jewelry as a means of teaching me how to work metal.… It didn't have anything to do with ornamentation."**[32]

Falkenstein worked with two-dimensional and shallow reliefs during the mid- to late 1940s. From 1946 through 1948 she investigated the sculptural possibilities of laminated plastics and resins, and as was becoming her pattern, she found someone who could advise her on the use of these materials.[33] In the most successful works of this type, she did relief carving on Plexiglas and then mounted the carving in a painted wood box and illuminated it from behind with fluorescent light. One of these works, *Fluids in Motion*, also known as *Circuit* (1947; opposite), is a magical descendant of her earlier surrealist paintings, with linear elements and open spaces that create movement throughout the surface. Her experimentation continued with war-surplus aluminum. Instead of using this metal as a flat surface, she bent it into a curve and then airbrushed it with a geometric motif. *Aerial* (1947; p. 26) is the finest of these works, pierced by holes and with a marked subtlety of surface. As Falkenstein remarked later, **"No one to my knowledge was painting on aluminum."**[34]

In 1947 Falkenstein created her first sculptural installation, *Suspension, Transparency, and Reflection*. This was a collaboration with a woman landscape architect to create a space for the Oakland

32. **Ibid., 82.**

33. **Ibid., 77, 88.**

34. **Ibid., 63–64.**

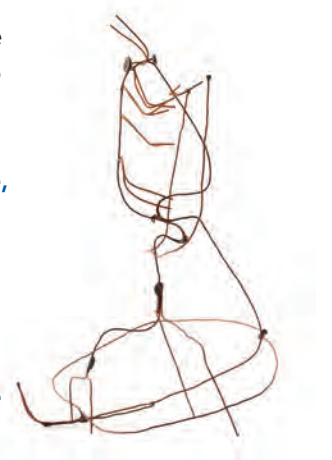
Wood and Brass Necklace with Obsidian, **ca. 1947. Wood, brass, obsidian; 7 × 6 inches.** Private collection.
OPPOSITE Fluids in Motion, **or** Circuit, **1947. Relief carving on Plexiglas in wood box with fluorescent light, 33 ¼ × 45 × 5 inches.**

Aerial, **1947. Etched and airbrushed aluminum, 32 × 29 × 7 ¼ inches.**
Whitney Museum of American Art. Gift of The Falkenstein Foundation.

Flower Show. Once more, she worked with new materials such as plate glass, mirrors, and, for the first time, water.[35] The following year, exploring yet another medium, Falkenstein won first prize for her wallpaper design for the American Institute of Designers awards, an international competition.[36] From this creative experience she **"learned something about continuity … infinity,"** which would lead to important developments in her work almost immediately and—even more—later.[37] She pursued these ideas in the Barcelona series (1949; p. 80), monumental gouaches often painted over Spanish posters. Unlike her earlier paintings, these are almost allover compositions; the movement suggested by the application of paint implied an extension beyond the edges of the paper.

In the late 1940s, while she was writing for *Arts and Architecture*, Falkenstein explored yet another medium, cinema. Her first film was of an exhibition at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco that included several of her works. She wrote the script and shot the film herself, titling it *Touching the Quick* (ca. 1949): **"I used the exhibition as a point of departure, the exhibition was related to nature in various ways. [There were images of] the ocean, fire, all kinds of associations.… It was very avant-garde at the time."**[38] She regarded the project as a continuation of her explorations in other mediums: **"Cinema is one of the most [forward-looking of] graphic media.… My attitude about film is that I'm just extending myself … with the use of imagery in motion."**[39]

In 1948 Falkenstein had a one-person exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Art, which included her linear sculptures. In 1950 she made a small sculpture of stovepipe wire that she called *Model* (right). The piece was so thin that its movement was not only implicit in its line; it could also be easily and delicately put in motion. She knew that this piece was important, that it was the exemplar for an entirely new direction in her art.[40] Its implications were not, however, to be explored in San Francisco. **"I always wanted to go to Paris,"** she recalled. **"I think from the time of my junior year, I got awakened to the whole French formal attitude."**[41]



Leda #1, **or** Model, **1950. Stovepipe wire, 14 × 13 × 9 inches.** See page 63.

35. **Ibid., 73, 74.**

36. **Ibid., 59.**

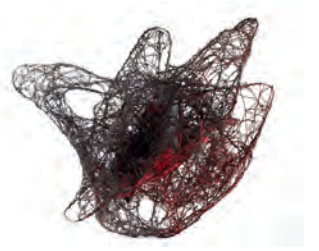
37. **Ibid., 60.**

38. **Ibid., 234–35.**

39. **Ibid., 231.**

40. **Maren Henderson, conversation with the author, September 27, 2015.**

41. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 87.**



Sun, **1960–61. Copper. 38 ½ × 75 × 30 inches.**
See page 64.

By this time she had already shown her work in the annual Salon des Réalités Nouvelles there on three occasions. **"I felt as though I had explored all the possibilities in San Francisco. And … I wanted to meet the masters. I wanted to see Brancusi, I wanted to meet Arp.… I don't think it's so urgent nowadays as it was in the forties and fifties."**[42] In addition, **"the fact that Europe had been a kind of seeding ground for painting and sculpture for … I don't know how many centuries.… And I felt that I wanted to establish some … psychological and ideological roots for myself."**[43] In 1950 Falkenstein left on a six-week tour of Europe that included Paris. Instead of returning to San Francisco, she stayed in that city off and on for about a dozen years, a sojourn that would mark the end of her marriage. (Maren Henderson's essay in this catalogue discusses Falkenstein's work and experiences in Paris and Italy during this period.)

Falkenstein returned to the United States permanently by 1963, moving to Los Angeles. An invitation from the art dealer Esther Robles to create a fountain drew her to the city.[44] She felt that Los Angeles offered more opportunity than San Francisco: **"It was a matter of earning a living. There were no collectors.… [In San Francisco] you could teach, and even that wasn't enough to take care of you, because the amount of money you'd make teaching was very little."**[45] Los Angeles not only had a more active base of collectors but was **"sort of a frontier town, and there's a sense of liberty here."**[46] She explained, **"We don't have the big, strong galleries that are in New York, so there isn't that sense of obligation to do certain things in order to get paid.… You work a lot here … for the love of it."**[47] She did not have a contract with a gallery in Los Angeles—few artists did at the time—so she depended on sales and commissions.

42. **Ibid., 27.**

43. **Ibid., 28.**

44. **Goodwin, introduction, xi.**

45. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 170.**

46. **Ibid., 171, 249.**

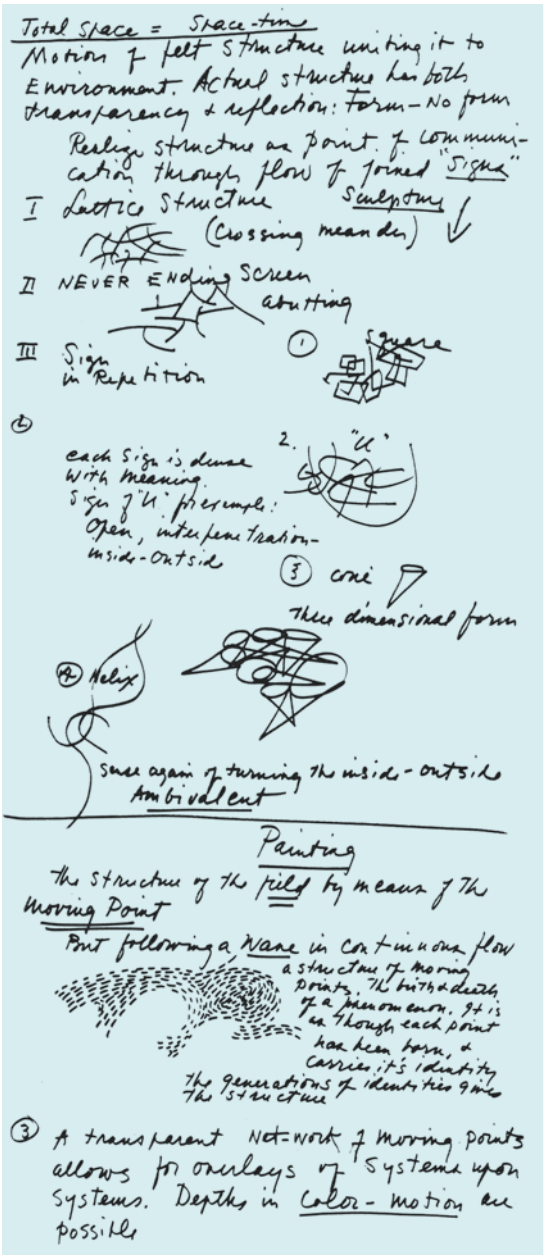
47. **Ibid., 250.**

48. **Ibid., 135.**

By the time Falkenstein arrived in Los Angeles, she was fifty-three, a mature artist but one with no roots in the city, unlike artists such as Lorser Feitelson, Ynez Johnson, Helen Lundeberg, and June Wayne, who had lived there for many years. In addition, the early 1960s saw the emergence of a younger generation of Los Angeles artists, most famously those associated with the Ferus Gallery. Their interests in assemblage, light and space constructions, and pop-related imagery were very different from Falkenstein's approach to creating art. They were not very interested in the work of the older generation (with the particular exception of the hard-edge geometric abstractions of John McLaughlin). And Falkenstein herself was often intolerant of the art of others.

For Falkenstein, the crucial changes in her art during the years on the Continent influenced her work for the rest of her career. In Paris, **"for the first time I began to have a sense of the spiritual quality of a piece, spiritual in the sense of direct total work, not just a breaking up of space or of design or of ambiguous meaning."**[48] She also realized she **"had the philosophy [that] came through [a] social**

**Falkenstein in her studio at 719 Ocean Avenue, Venice, California, 1975.**



Never Ending Screen, **1970s.**
**Copper, 19 × 19 × ¼ inches.**
See page 65.

**attitude of … wanting man to be within nature, and nature to be within the work, and everything to be together."**[49]

Falkenstein also used the entire innovative formal language that she had developed in Europe for her work in Los Angeles. Her approach to composition now involved the repetition of similar or identical forms to build up an individual piece. She came to think of **"structure as [a] point of communication [of the] flow of joined 'Signs,'"** resulting in a body of work that she called Point as a Set.[50] The "Signs" included the Sign of the "U," the Cone, the Helix, the Lattice Structure (inspired by the Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí), and finally the Never Ending Screen.[51] In general she had also come to understand that she couldn't start with a small piece and just enlarge it: **"Scale is one of the most important concepts to have, especially if [you] do large-scale work."**[52]

During her first two years in Los Angeles, Falkenstein continued to develop an innovative body of work that she had begun in Paris, the Suns (pp. 28, 64), which consisted of laboriously welded sculptures with curved exteriors that enclosed space. The works she made during this period were often visually complex because of the numerous elements and the multitude of welds holding them together. The Never Ending Screen (above) was becoming her most radical notion. This was an approach to open-ended

49. **Ibid., 130.**

50. **Falkenstein, inscription on untitled, undated drawing reproduced in Henderson, "Sculpture," 97.**

51. **Falkenstein, in AAA oral history, 8.**

52. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 243.**

**Structures drawings, after 1960. Reproduction of original ink-on-paper drawing.**

The Sign, **or** Moving Points, **1961. Gouache and watercolor on paper, 19 × 25 inches.**

Corona (Fusion), **1971. Brazed copper and fused glass, 8 ¼ × 12 ¼ × 7 ½ inches.** Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David K. Anderson, Martha Jackson Memorial Collection, 1981.109.8.

Structure and Flow No. 2, **1965. Copper, Venetian glass; 14 × 37 × 30 feet. California Federal Bank Building, Los Angeles (destroyed).**

composition involving the repetition of small spaces defined by very thin pieces of metal, and creating **"a continuum of interval."**[53] **"[It] came into my work from the need … of expressing … extension into outer space, … of infinity, and yet to do a structure."**[54] Sometimes she would combine several of these forms in single work, especially in a few of her Southern California commissions.[55]

Falkenstein also began to adapt the sculptural concept of the Point, which she had developed in Europe, to two-dimensional works that she called Moving Points (pp. 31, 53, 54–55, 73, 96), and this effort came to fruition in Southern California. She described her process: **"Each time you make a point it's a new start … and it's maturing in conjunction with other points, and then finally the whole is completed.… One point finally generates a surface, a field."**[56] In Europe she also had begun to create a group of sculptures that she called Fusions. These works combined welded metal with pieces of Murano glass, which were melted so that they bonded with the metal forms. Because of technical problems, she began using copper tubing as the welded-metal component of the Fusions in Los Angeles.[57]

Falkenstein's first large permanent outdoor sculptural installations in Europe—the monumental gates for the Pignatelli villa (p. 68) and the glass-embedded entrance gates for Peggy Guggenheim's palazzo in Venice (pp. 90–91)—set the stage for her large commissions in California. She was well prepared to create her first fountain, the commission for Esther Robles that brought her to Southern California. As she had learned to do in Europe, she made a detailed model to plan this and every subsequent commission.[58] In the fountain *Structure and Flow No. 1*, completed in 1964 and based on the Sign of the "U," **"water [continued] the line that the [copper] tubes made because the water was coming through the tubes,"** which resulted in constant motion.[59] As Falkenstein stated later, **"This was right with my philosophy. [In other works] it's air with structure. [Here] it was water with structure."**[60] Hers was an extraordinarily innovative approach compared to conventional approaches to sculptural fountains, which are typically pieces of sculpture that water splashes against.

In 1965 Falkenstein completed the most ambitious fountain-sculpture of her career, *Structure and Flow No. 2* (opposite), for the front of the California Federal Bank Building, a key location on Wilshire Boulevard, one of Los Angeles's major thoroughfares. Again using Point as a Set as her sculptural language, she combined the copper tubes not only with water but also with innumerable pieces of colored glass. This was a monumental work of visual movement, fourteen feet high and forty-seven feet across. **"When the water was turned on, fragments of copper and … chunks of sparkling glass appeared to be tossed about and tumbling in the water."**[61] This last project led to *Game Wall* (1965), her first exterior wall relief, which adorned the exterior of the gymnasium at California State University, Fullerton.

53. **Ibid., 190.**

54. **Ibid., 350.**

55. **Falkenstein, in AAA oral history, 19.**

56. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 241.**

57. **Ibid., 145.**

58. **Ibid., 347.**

59. **Ibid., 194.**

60. **Ibid., 195.**

61. **Henderson, "Sculpture," 125.**

It spread out over an eighty-foot wall, was eleven feet high, and started ten feet from the ground. The "games" were **"the symbolic, directional, linear structures which would proceed down the wall."**[62]

*"U" as a Set* (1965), which clearly states its sculptural system, is another fountain-sculpture by Falkenstein commissioned by California State University, Long Beach, for the First International Sculpture Symposium. In 1966 she made *Three Fires* for the Fresno Mall, the first works to come from her new Venice, California, studio.[63] Another inspired commission in Costa Mesa, *DNA Molecule* (1970), was based on then-recent discoveries in genetics. Fifteen feet high and five feet wide, the work was a **"kinetic sculpture, the exterior and the interior act against each other.… When it moves, [it] will bring about the double helix."**[64]

And in 1966 Falkenstein received the largest commission of her career for the new Saint Basil's Catholic Church, also on Wilshire Boulevard. The commission consisted of a rectory screen, eight screenlike entrance doors, and fifteen three-dimensional stained-glass windows (pp. 37–43), an exceptional innovation compared with the usual two-dimensional church stained glass. The church's nave window sculptures are 80 feet high; that of the connected tower is 130 feet high. All of them are framed in Cor-Ten steel.[65] Falkenstein described the church's symbolic program: **"from the narthex to the altar, you go through the passion [of Christ].… So what I did was to carry the passion … from cool [colors] to hot."**[66] She adapted

62. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 267.**

63. **Goodwin, introduction, xi.**

64. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 297.**

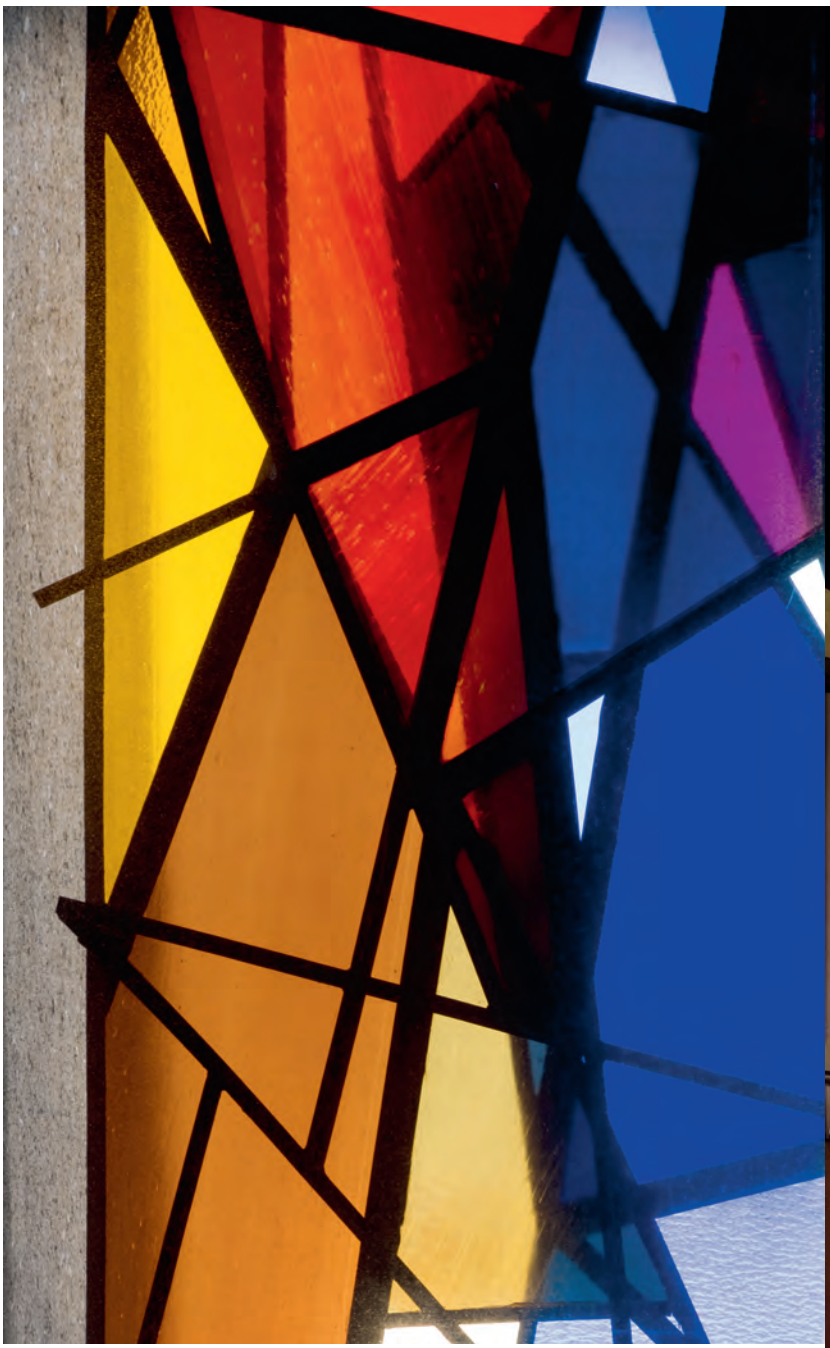
65. **Goodwin, introduction, xii.**

66. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 264.**

PAGES 37–43 Window sculptures, **1968–69. Cor-Ten steel and stained glass; nave 80 feet high; varying widths from 80 × 2 feet to 80 × 4 feet; tower window, eight doors, narthex bronze, rectory screen and doors. Saint Basil's Catholic Church, Los Angeles.**

35

EXIT



her existing formal vocabulary for the project: **"I had the idea of using my never-ending screen, but in three dimensions. And with this part of my vocabulary I was able to … express not only form and … relationships to the architecture of the church, but also a very good idea that works with a religious attitude."**[67] All the windows are based on **"the sign of a triangle, which is symbolic of the trinity."**[68] And, **"because it's the never-ending screen, there is this sense of eternity and the sense of moving upward,"** with the Cor-Ten structures going beyond the glass and up into the air.[69]

Falkenstein continued doing three-dimensional commissions until sometime in the 1980s, and when she was not involved in creating a major public work, she made smaller individual sculptures. The innovations that marked her large commissions were also integral to her smaller pieces. She constructed several sculptures based on her category Point as a Set, such as a spheroidal work in welded copper from 1965 (right). The Never Ending Screen was the basis for a number of flat sculptural works made in Los Angeles, including one from the mid-1960s made in copper with gold and silver paint. And she produced numerous Fusion sculptures, including the small and brilliantly colorful *Corona (Fusion)* (1971; pp. 32–33).

Falkenstein took the most risks in sculptures that had no precedent in her earlier art. She created *Predator* (1963–64; opposite) from a shopping cart that had been abandoned near her studio. It actively involves the viewer, because its two sections—the black screenlike element incorporating the cart and the attached upper white section—are both movable, the "chariot" cart on wheels, the white section opening out like a predatory jaw. Falkenstein's main concept was **"an idea towards transparency."**[70] *Flora (Topology)* (1973; pp. 46–47), originally titled *Bronze Bell*, is a unique sculpture that also can actively involve the viewer. It has elements made of sheet bronze and a number of her Point elements attached to the thinnest of bronze poles (recalling plant forms) on a flat base mounted on a cam.

Point as a Set, **1965. Welded copper, 34 × 34 × 34 inches.**
See page 70.

67. **Falkenstein, in AAA oral history, 3.**

68. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 344.**

69. **Ibid., 264.**

70. **Ibid., 356.**

Predator, **1963–64 (open and closed). Shopping cart with painted wire and metal, 70 × 36 × 89 inches.**

Flora (Topology), **1973. Bronze, kinetic motor; 48 × 60 × 36 inches.**

Emblem I, **1978. Bamboo, linen canvas, paint, copper; 107 × 106 × 19 inches.**

When it is moved by hand, the Point elements create sound as they strike the sheet bronze.[71] And in 1978 she created a number of innovative works called Emblems that combined elements of sculpture and painting. Each was a three-dimensional bamboo structure with copper, attached to a suspended painted linen canvas. One of these sculptures was even on wheels, another piece that could be moved by the viewer.

Falkenstein's work in sculpture during the 1960s also led her to create an exceptionally innovative suite of eleven intaglio prints, titled *Struttura Grafica* (p. 50), in 1964 with a great master printer in Milan, Giorgio Upiglio. The works were printed from very thin three-dimensional sculptures rather than traditional flat copper plates. The range of the prints in this series is remarkable, from the delicacy of an almost colorless Never Ending Screen to the bold gold and black motifs printed from attached metal sheets and wires. Falkenstein introduced innovative techniques, creating folded and shaped works that were printed on both sides of the paper (p. 51).

There came a point, as Falkenstein got older, when she could no longer weld or assemble her own sculptures, which she had always done in order to keep complete control of her art. So in her later years she turned her attention to painting. She had created brilliant motion-filled paintings in the 1960s based on the Moving Points. Some of these, like *La Brea* (1967; p. 53), contained immense numbers of Points, some of which were organized into almost monumental Point-like circles. Another, *White Painting* (1969; p. 96), she turned forty-five degrees, transforming it into a diamond. And there was one masterpiece among these Moving Points paintings: *Orbit the Earth* (1963; pp. 54–55). Inspired by the manned spaceflights that began to circle our planet during that decade, it is composed of nine separate panels with an overall dimension of seven feet high by almost twenty feet wide. It becomes like a Moving Points map of the world in black and white with a large central brown section serving as a metaphor for land. Thin, curved black lines are like spacecraft orbits. Falkenstein's often-stated desire to express nature and movement is fulfilled in this large-scale work.

71. **Ibid., 293.**

Untitled, **from the portfolio** Struttura Grafica, **1964. Relief intaglio on Fabriano Rosaspina paper, 27 ½ × 19 ½ inches.**

Untitled, **1976. Color lithograph printed on both sides of paper, 50⅝ × 22 inches.**

In her late paintings of the 1990s Falkenstein's direct way of creating both sculpture and painting was expressed in figuration, harking back to the two-dimensional works from the beginning of her career. But all the intervening decades made these canvases entirely different, compositionally open and filled with movement. As she said in an interview, **"I use the figure as a point of departure. I don't copy it. See how intervals are related one to another and how the whole thing comes into action because of [that]."**[72] A lot of her imagery in her late paintings was "prehistoric" or, as in *Abstraction with Figures* (1994; p. 56), implied the eternal relationship between man and woman.[73] One late painting, however, was topical. The severe grisaille canvas *Crash Landing* (1992; p. 57) was an expression of the destruction and pain of the 1992 Los Angeles riots. And one exceptional Moving Points painting, *Vortex* (1992; p. 58)—again possibly inspired by the riots—is like a summation, uniting not only Points but also linear sections related to some of her sculptural bodies of work, such as the Signs.

In interviews late in her life, Falkenstein reflected on her entire career and the future of her work. **"The reason that I finally was pretty much alone, because I didn't compromise … because my life is based on truth as I see it.… That's another reason that my commissions, my big public works, have never been compromising.… And each one of them is a step ahead for me in technique and concept and workmanship."**[74] She regretted the destruction of some of her most ambitious commissions: **"[It] is a terrible thing about America. There doesn't seem to be control over public sculpture."**[75] And she thought about the longevity of her art in general: **"You don't know how long your works are going to last. But I'm doing what I love to do. In fact, I'm doing the only thing I'm capable of doing."**[76]

72. **Falkenstein, in AAA oral history, 32.**

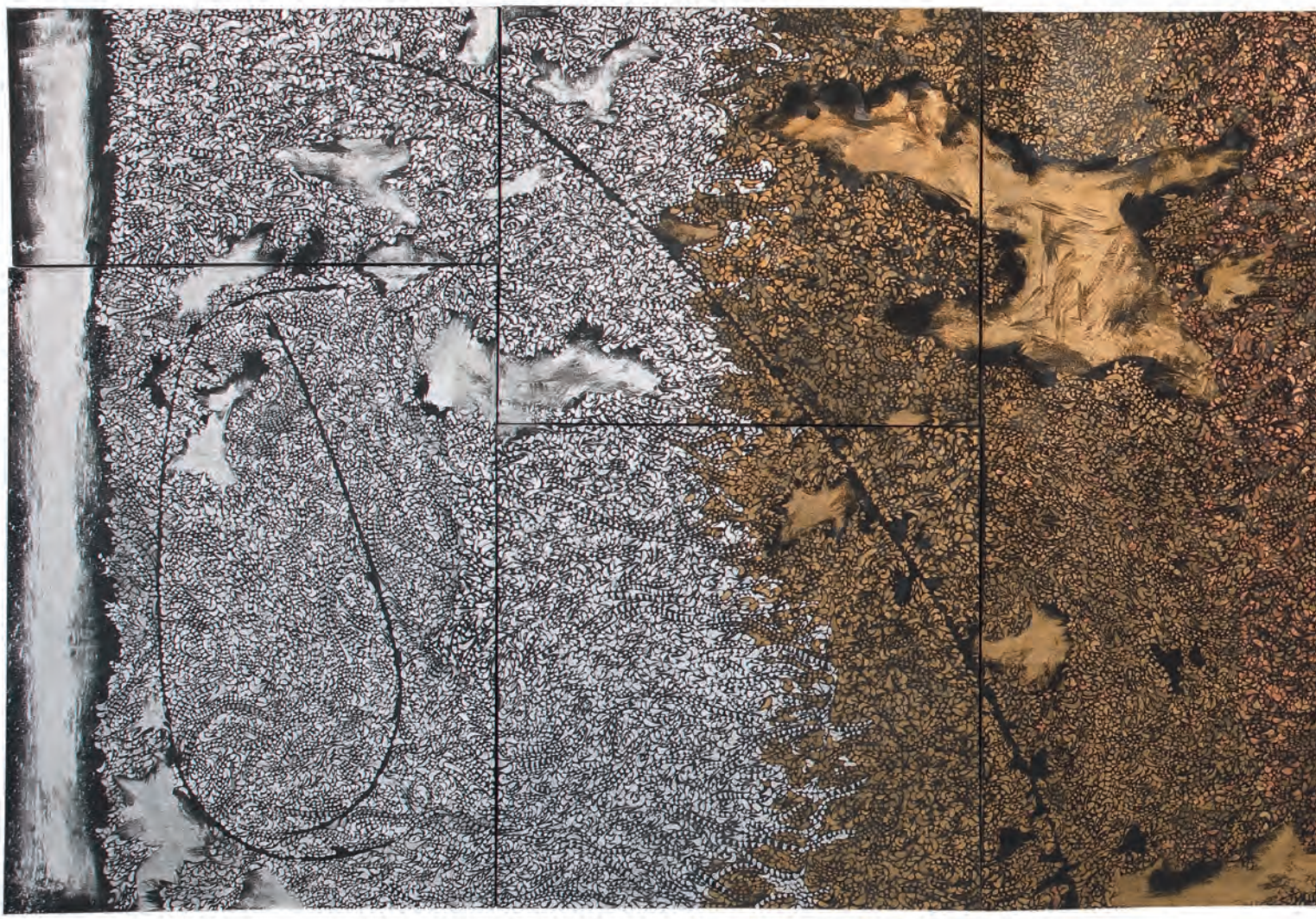
73. **Ibid., 33.**

74. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 182.**

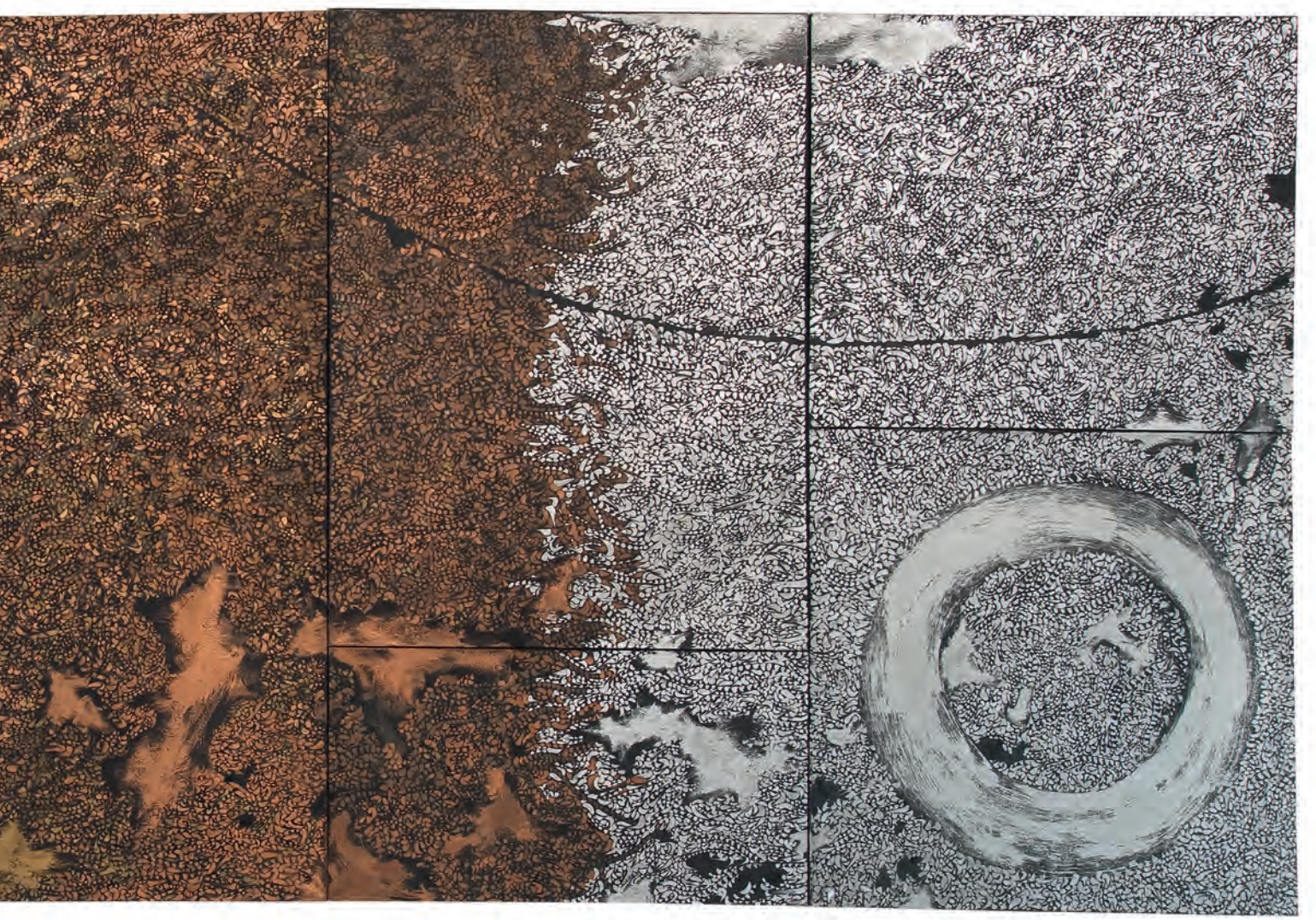
75. **Falkenstein, in AAA oral history, 21.**

76. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 288.**

La Brea (Moving Point Series), **1967. Acrylic or oil on canvas, 72 × 60 inches.**
Palm Springs Art Museum. Gift of The Falkenstein Foundation.



Orbit the Earth, **1963. Oil on canvas; nine panels, 84 × 238 ½ inches overall.**



Abstraction with Figures, **1994. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 108 inches.**

Crash Landing, **1992. Acrylic on canvas, 78 × 54 inches.** Private collection.

Vortex, **1992. Acrylic and oil on canvas, 23 × 30 inches.**

And she never allowed herself to stagnate: **"You always have to prove yourself again. And I suppose in a way that's good, because it means you're growing.… I'm moving all the time."**[77]

Claire Falkenstein did demonstrate the singular quality of her vision throughout her almost seventy-year career. She captured nature and the nature of artistic creation. She consistently conveyed a sense of motion in her work and in the development of her art. And she had an extraordinary ability to innovate, developing her own language of form for sculpture and painting. The results will endure, a testament to her uncompromising and entirely unique vision.

77. **Ibid., 278.**

# THE PARIS YEARS

Maren Henderson

**Preparing to leave San Francisco in 1950 for New York City, Claire Falkenstein took a quick tour of Europe, which changed her plans.** A week in Paris stretched to about a dozen years—in fact, to the rest of her life. Even after moving to Southern California in the early 1960s, she kept her Paris studio, gallery, and patrons, as she continued to exhibit in Europe.

There is no doubt that Falkenstein considered 1950 a watershed in her career, in her thought, in her artwork, and even in the pace of her life. Significantly, she took with her a small experimental wire structure, with the modest but prescient title *Model* (p. 63). She had been working with wood at large scale (nine-foot logs) but experimenting with wire at small scale (as small as hatpins)—and this continued in Paris. Almost immediately, however, she began working with wire and metal rod, and her work increased dramatically in scale, in its range of techniques, and in its sculptural potential. And it was in Paris that she met Michel Tapié, a critic, art theorist, and collector who was at that moment putting into words ideas about new approaches to art with which Falkenstein's work would resonate.

When Falkenstein took her small, enigmatic *Model* to a metal shop to have it scaled up from fourteen inches to twelve feet, using iron rod, its daring originality was realized in direct metal work and now on a truly grand scale. With this, she was very much in line with the approach Tapié was advocating in his critical and quite passionate writings on the arts. Falkenstein described this new version as **"a linear drawing but twelve feet high and kinetic,"** with two movable parts that invited viewer participation.[1] It no longer fit on a tabletop, as did *Model*. Too large even for her combined studio/living space, the work had to be placed outside her window on a rooftop that she used as and called her "terrace" (opposite).

1. **Falkenstein, in "Claire Falkenstein: Oral History Transcript," interview conducted by Marjorie Rogers (Los Angeles: Oral History Program, University of California, 1982), 137–38; hereafter cited as UCLA oral history.**

Leda #2 **outside Falkenstein's studio in Paris, ca. 1951.**

The artist herself was struck by the effect of space as the major component of her new sculpture—and by the crisp delineation of three-dimensional space due to the trajectory of a spare metal rod. Colleagues suggested the Leda theme, and this larger version became known as *Sign of Leda* (1953).[2] Tapié immediately commissioned a smaller version to be cast in bronze. This was a commission that Falkenstein, as a newcomer, needed, but it was also a problem. Bronze was an expensive material, involving foundry costs and final finishing. Falkenstein—ever experimenting—created a new version of Leda, using inexpensive stovepipe wire. Weaving the wire back and forth while securing joints with welds, she essentially developed a lattice. She later stated, **"and that's where I got my technique for the wire structure."**[3]

*Sign of Leda* also struck Tapié as something genuinely new. As Falkenstein later recalled, he pronounced it **"much more interesting than a bronze casting, because here you have the direct method; the direct thought is not interfered with, as with the intermediary of a craftsman in doing a casting."** The artist would use this lattice structure, and further developments thereof, for the rest of her career. She said that her work became the **"expression of the technique"** as well as of the mythology of Leda. The new Leda for Tapié in 1953 **"turned out to be a completely see-through structure. And that was the beginning."**[4]

2. Its precursor, *Model*, later became known as *Leda #1*.

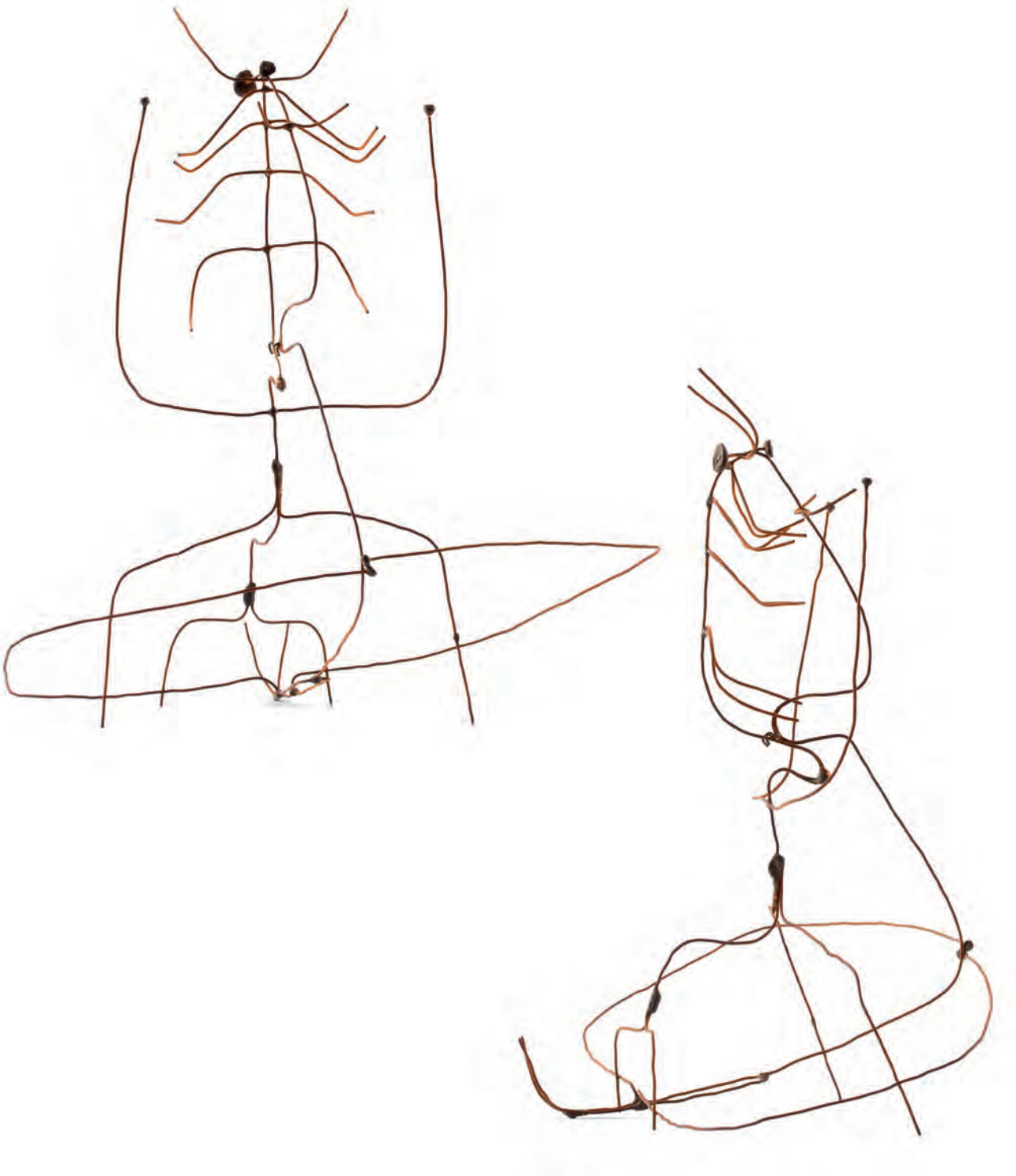
3. Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 134.

4. Ibid., 138.

5. Michel Tapié, "A New Beyond" (1952), trans. Jerrold Lanes, in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, ed. Herschel Chipp with Peter Selz and Joshua C. Taylor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 603.

## *ART AUTRE*: AN "OTHER ART"

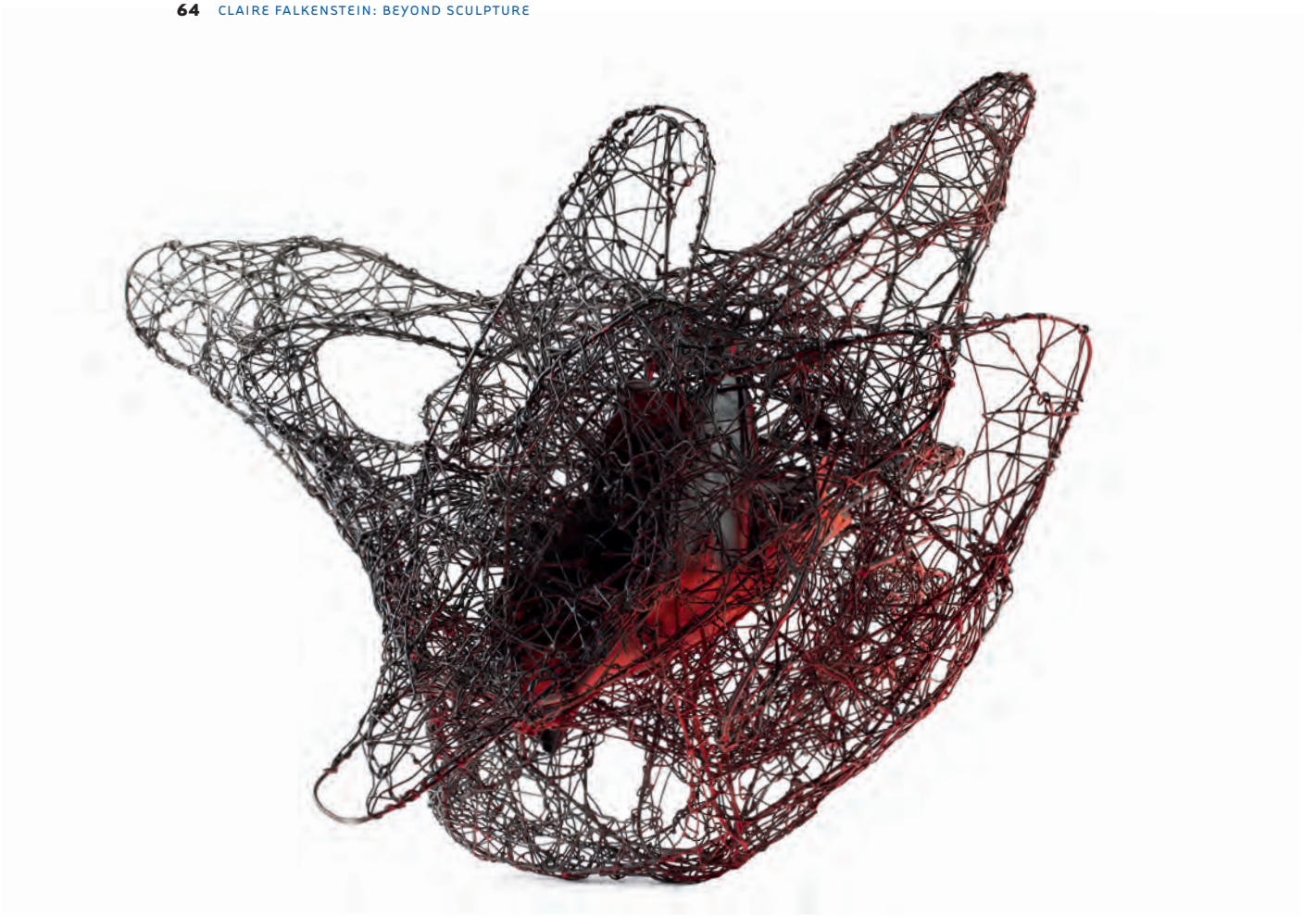
In his writings, Tapié was advocating for change—not incremental but fundamental change—the kind that requires new definitions. He rejected such concepts as styles ("the death of creativity"), aesthetics ("an excuse"), and movements ("with their attendant theologian-critics"). He criticized these and other terms as so ubiquitous in art conversation that they could control its direction and stifle progress. He argued that art must be "other" than it is. He championed the artist as an "Individual," interested in unknown territory, in "high adventure," as "willing to risk everything"—and well beyond searching for conclusions. Tapié wrote, "It is no longer the movements that interest us but the authentic—and how much more rare—Individuals."[5] Further, the work of the "Individual" must always be in a state of "becoming" something else, undergoing a steady transformation from one state to a changed state. While



Leda #1, **or** Model, **1950. Stovepipe wire, 14 × 13 × 9 inches.**

Falkenstein was still in California, critics there had written about her work as if bewildered, asking what she was doing and where she was going with her current work. Later a curator who had left her out of an exhibition admitted to the artist, "Claire, we didn't know where to put you."[6] In Tapié, she met someone who recognized her continuing adventure.

6.
**Claire Falkenstein, conversation with the author, ca. 1980s. This was confirmed by the curator in question.**



## THE SUNS

Falkenstein began further experiments using her lattice structure as a sculptural medium. Her **"linear drawing[s] in space,"** as she described her wire constructions, gradually began to envelop space, making space itself quite clear as a distinctive shape.[7] The specific inspiration was the sun itself—a fiery sphere, sometimes exploding, sometimes quieter but essentially a highly volatile shape in midair. The artist described her Suns as **"large space-consuming symbols of fire."**[8] This generated new explorations and would result in a series of at least twenty-five Suns.[9]

In *Sun* (1960–61; above), slender rods are configured in loops projecting in every direction but secured by skeins of copper wire. The result is a lattice network of baffling complexity. As in other works from the Sun series, the lattice structure is the medium, providing an envelope for space, light, and in this case the color red—provided by a red object tucked well into the interior.

Sun, **1960–61. Copper, 38 ½ × 75 × 30 inches.**

7. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 141.**

8. **Falkenstein, in *Claire Falkenstein, in San Francisco, Paris, Los Angeles, and Now Palm Springs Desert Museum* (Palm Springs, CA: Palm Springs Desert Museum, 1960), unpaged.**

9. **Falkenstein noted, "I did twenty-five or twenty-six *Suns* finally from 1954–63." UCLA oral history, 140.**

## LATTICE: "NOT A DESIGNED FORM [BUT] CREATED MATTER"[10]

The lattice system developed as a solution to a problem and became a process and finally a sculptural medium in itself. To Falkenstein, it meant she could make any form she imagined—any shape, any size—using a wide variety of metals. The structure could also be remarkably tough. And depending on the gauge of the wire or metal rod or tubing, it could be airy and lightweight (as in the Suns) or dense and heavy (as in her later Point as a Set series). This "created matter" was also versatile enough for Falkenstein to use in portraits of both the critic Michel Tapié and the artist Karel Appel—hollow shapes full of light but also likeness and even personality.

10. **Falkenstein, in *Claire Falkenstein*, unpaged.**

Never Ending Screen, **1970s. Copper, 19 × 19 × ¼ inches.**

Continuum, **1956. Welded steel, tin wire; 39 ⅛ × 20 ⅛ × 13 ¼ inches.**
Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York.

## CONTINUUM

Fascinated by Tapié's "becoming" and the concept of the continuum, Falkenstein created several works with the title *Continuum*. She used the term not in the sense of "continuous" but rather to refer to a transition from one condition to a different one, without any abrupt breaks and, significantly, without a conclusion. It meant a development from one concept or system to an "other."[11] Falkenstein's Sun series is a continuum, increasingly complex and always changing. Her Continuum works use the devices of the Sun series with quite different results. The space is not shaped but is elongated and more like a twisted tree branch. Both series are constructed of similar metals, but in the Continuum works the wire, metal rods, and tubing are twisted together—the tubing providing the framework, the rods weaving through this, and the wires in small tangles at regular intervals. A Continuum could be any length: short enough to hold in a hand or long enough to extend across a room. Appearing haphazard at first, *Continuum* (1956; opposite) is a carefully engineered thirty-nine-inch-tall composition. The heavier tubing provides the framework, supporting the wires in tangled units throughout.

On close study, the method of manufacture is clear—this is direct metal structure of the highest level of craftsmanship. Each weld is smooth and precise; each tube is pinched flat at both ends, with various recurring elements in a notably rhythmic sequence.

11. **Falkenstein's reference was always "the space-time continuum," with space and time as part of the same continuum rather than as separate entities.**

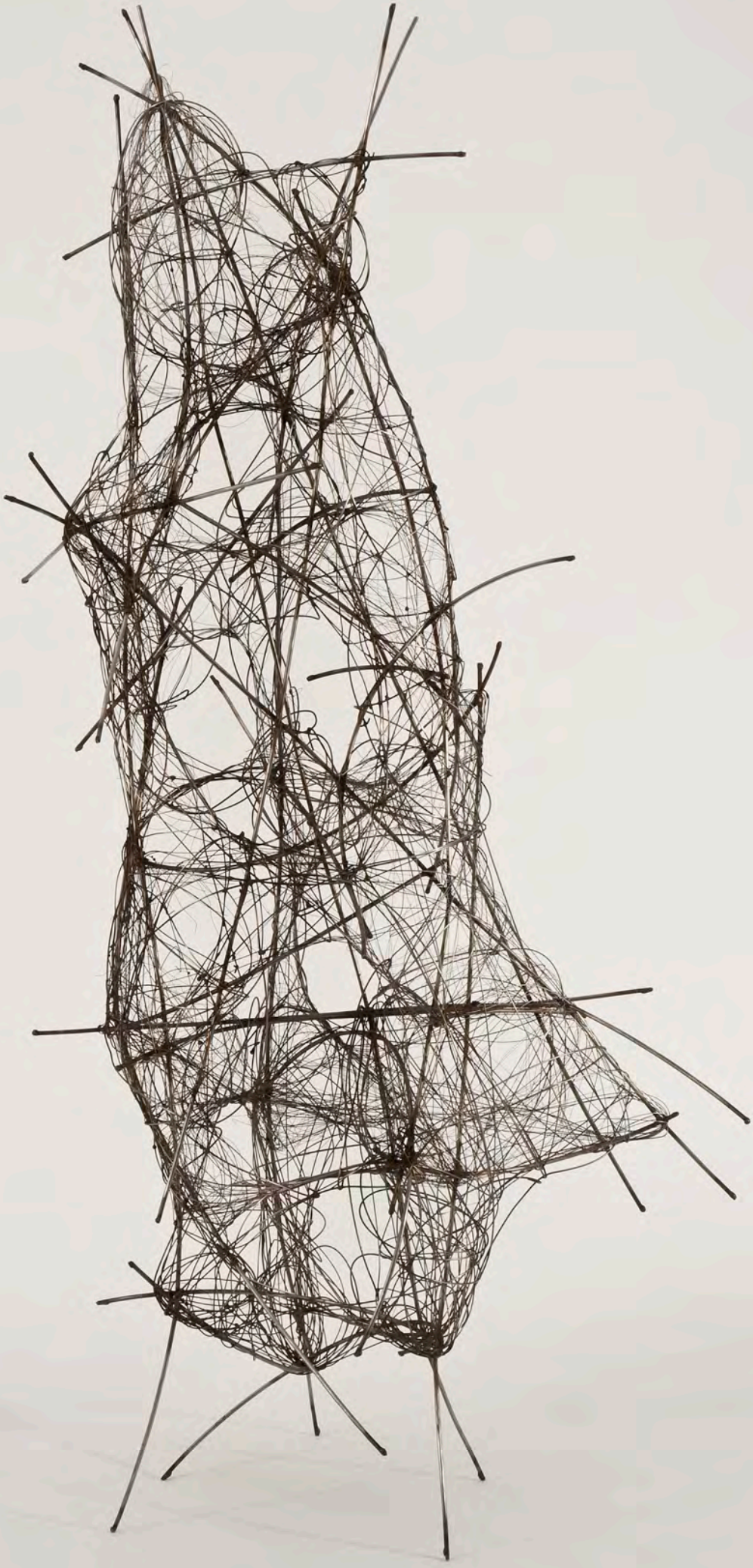
## GLASS

On seeing Falkenstein's *Sign of Leda* in 1953, the avant-garde Italian architect Luigi Moretti commissioned her to design the entrance stair railing for his new Galleria Spazio in Rome.[12] With Falkenstein's composition, it soon became an "entrance sculpture" from floor to ceiling.[13] Similar to *Sign of Leda*, Falkenstein's design was a "linear delineation" in iron rod until Moretti suggested incorporating colored glass—**"so that when the sun comes through the door, it will cast color onto the floor and into the air."**[14] Inspired by this suggestion, Falkenstein inserted bits of colored glass into the framework. The result was a striking effect of sweeping black lines and

12. **A distinguished architect and urban planner, Moretti was founder and editor of the magazine *Spazio: Review of Arts and Architecture* and, in 1954, founder of the Galleria Spazio in Rome. Among his famous architectural achievements is the Watergate complex in Washington, DC.**

13. **It should be noted that Moretti always referred to this project as a "stair railing" while Falkenstein always referred to it as a "stair sculpture." On completion it was definitely not a railing in any conventional sense.**

14. **Quoted by Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 143.**



Pignatelli Gates, **1957. Steel with Venetian glass insets, 14 × 27 × 4 feet. Pignatelli villa, Santa Marinella, Italy, on the Tyrrhenian Sea just north of Rome (destroyed).**

chunks of glass, with color and light pouring into the gallery through the sculpture. An immediate success, the work led to a similar commission for the gallery of Rodolphe Stadler, her dealer in Paris. The combination of colored glass with a metal framework would be of lasting significance in Falkenstein's work. She began to study glass through endless experiments, developing considerable expertise. Glass became a principal component of much of her subsequent work, including many of her largest public commissions.

## PIGNATELLI GATES

Collaborating again with Luigi Moretti, Falkenstein was commissioned to create the large gates for a boathouse opening onto the Tyrrhenian Sea from the villa of the Pignatelli family.[15] She not only designed these but also built them—essentially by hand—working on the beach with cold rolled strip steel. As she described it, **"I had a forge, a very simple forge, you know, just one that was hand-run."**[16]

The basic unit was a simple, curved, linear element, her Sign of the "U," which would now begin to appear in many works.[17] Like a building block, it was repeated and repeated to create a dense web of curves, with joints welded to secure the developing structure.

The *Pignatelli Gates* (1957; opposite) were not simple, two-dimensional gates. The opening to the boathouse was large and slightly asymmetrical, with a distinct slant, all of which the artist had to accommodate. In fact the gates had to be thicker (four feet)—and thus weightier—at the top than at the bottom (one foot). And being gates for constant use, they required durability and ease of handling as well as security. Again Falkenstein incorporated chunks of glass, which introduced light reflections and color to ensure continually changing effects.

The project presented a different set of challenges: beyond ease of handling, the weight of the material, and weather in general, there were shifting tides and significant wind loads. As the artist noted, **"In these cases, you can design anything, but you have to think like an engineer."**[18] She was now working on an architectural scale, and this would continue in both public and private projects for the rest of her life. This was the first of at least five sets of gates, the best known being the *Garden Gates* (1961; pp. 90–91), the principal entrance to the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, Italy.

15. **Located in Santa Marinella, just north of Rome.**

16. **Claire Falkenstein, conversation with the author, ca. 1980s.**

17. **The Sign of the "U" could be a complete *U* or any section of it.**

18. **Claire Falkenstein, lecture, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, ca. 1970s.**

Point as a Set, **1965. Welded copper, 34 × 34 × 34 inches.**

**POINT AS A SET**

The Point as a Set series (below) evolved from the structure of the Pignatelli Gates and the use of the *U* form as a "sign." Each Point as a Set is a sphere that began from a single sign. These "sets" were made of wire, metal rod, or metal tubing—or all of these combined. By an additive process, the artist built them up, meticulously welding the points of contact and thereby creating the structure. The sign became the module that was then multiplied into a set; the sets in turn multiplied into an often vast "ensemble," literally with hundreds of individual signs. Basic to the concept was the possibility of infinite extension—as with other bodies of work,

such as Continuum, the Moving Point, and later the Never Ending Screen (p. 65).

The Point as a Set had a consistent texture throughout and a symmetry from every possible angle, including above and below. The unity is compelling. These sets were repetitive in general design, and the process itself was tedious and demanded fastidious craftsmanship to maintain balance. It involved cutting the copper tubing into short lengths, flattening the ends of each section while curving it slightly. Each piece was then positioned according to a carefully engineered density and welded into place. Falkenstein said, **"I begin in the center, and the thing moves not only outward, to expand with the idea—like the expanding universe, forever and ever—but also it has the motion through the sculpture."**[19] The repetition did not bother her. She explained: **"And the whole process is one of quiet contemplation and concentrated study for the interstices."**[20] There are no solid masses in these sculptures. The work is consistent throughout, with the same metal elements and the same spaces, or "interstices." Referring to her process, Falkenstein said, **"Well, I use the clamp, I use the striker, I use the hammer, I use the pliers, I use the torch—and that's it. It's very simple; it's very primitive."**[21]

As calculated and regular as the Points are in certain aspects, the surfaces appear highly irregular, with sharp edges projecting in every direction. And they are distinctly uninviting to the touch.

19. **Falkenstein, in UCLA oral history, 314.**

20. **Ibid., 347.**

21. **Ibid., 349.**

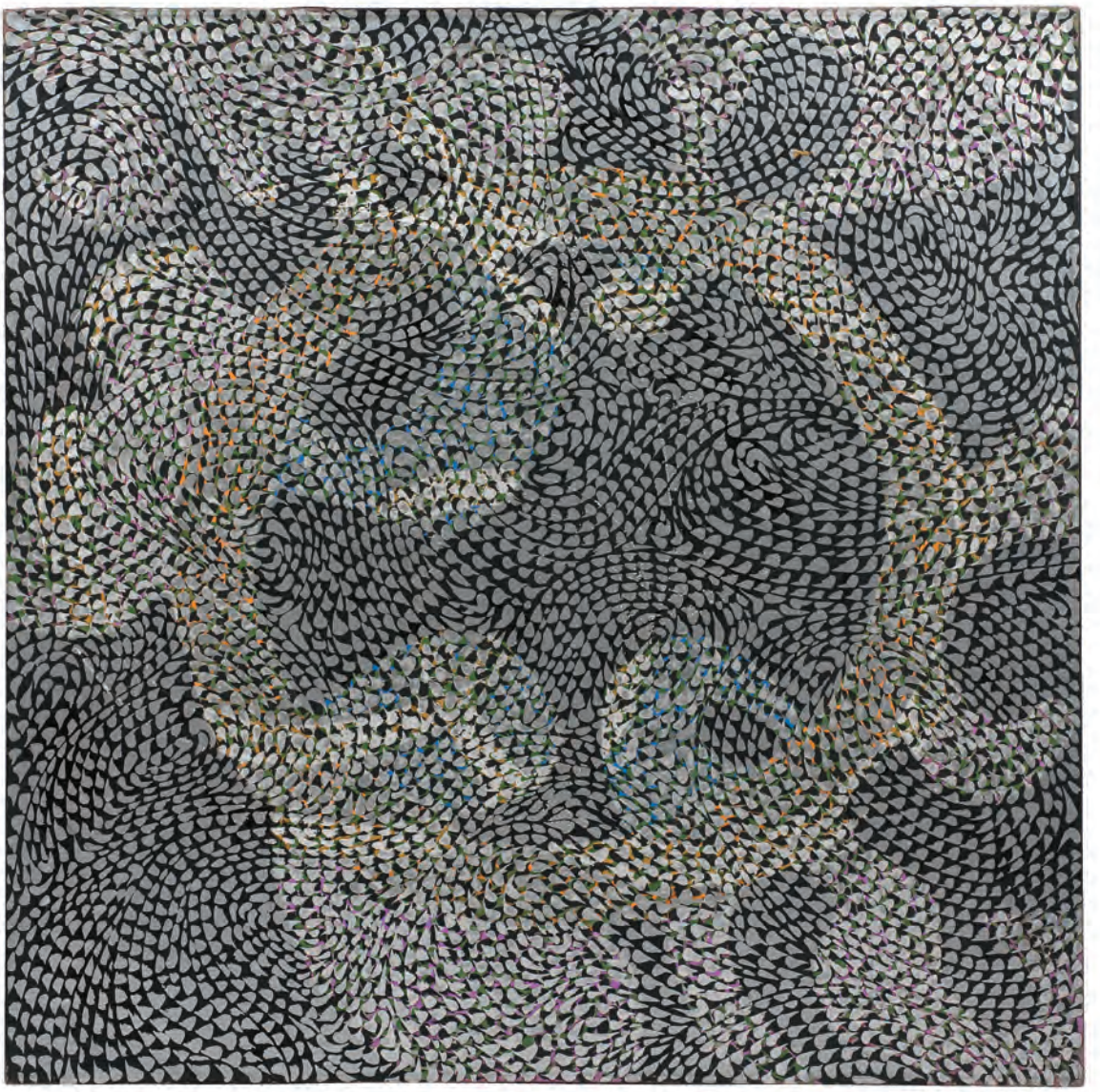
## THE MOVING POINT

On a train from Paris to Rome in 1959, Falkenstein sat up all night drawing—as was her habit when dealing with boredom. She drew for hours. Gradually the continuous drawings became a study in individual lines, then individual strokes of the pen or brush, each one effectively an image of the gesture itself—of putting pen to paper and lifting it—and then, in a repetitive motion, creating a manuscript.

Falkenstein said, **"By the time I got to Rome, I was doing moving point drawings."** And with the patterns of moving points on the surface, she created a field, or what she eventually called a **"field structure."** The Moving Point paintings (opposite and pp. 31, 53, 54–55, 96) are the result of a profoundly steady hand in motion, both rhythmic and directed. In Falkenstein's words, the moving point **"is a very rigorous kind of discipline,"** and she noted that, by comparison, **"sculpture is very free."**[22] Like great calligraphy, it was structured motion, not static form—an abstract script with exclusively visual meaning.

On Falkenstein's departure from Paris and return to the United States, she brought an array of her work so original, so varied, and so abundant that it was—and still is—challenging to comprehend as a whole. And she brought her *Model*.

22. **Ibid., 240, 241, 244.**



Moving Points in Silver, **1970. Acrylic on canvas, 48 × 48 inches.**

Vase, **ca. 1950s. Blown glass with glass fusions, 19 × 15 × 11 inches.**

Yosemite, **or** Colorspace #3, **1941. Oil on canvas, 22 × 18 inches.**
OPPOSITE Studies for Band Saw Sculptures, **1942. Gouache on paper, 17 ¾ × 13 ¾ inches.**
Accident, **1945. Collage on wood, 18 × 20 inches.**

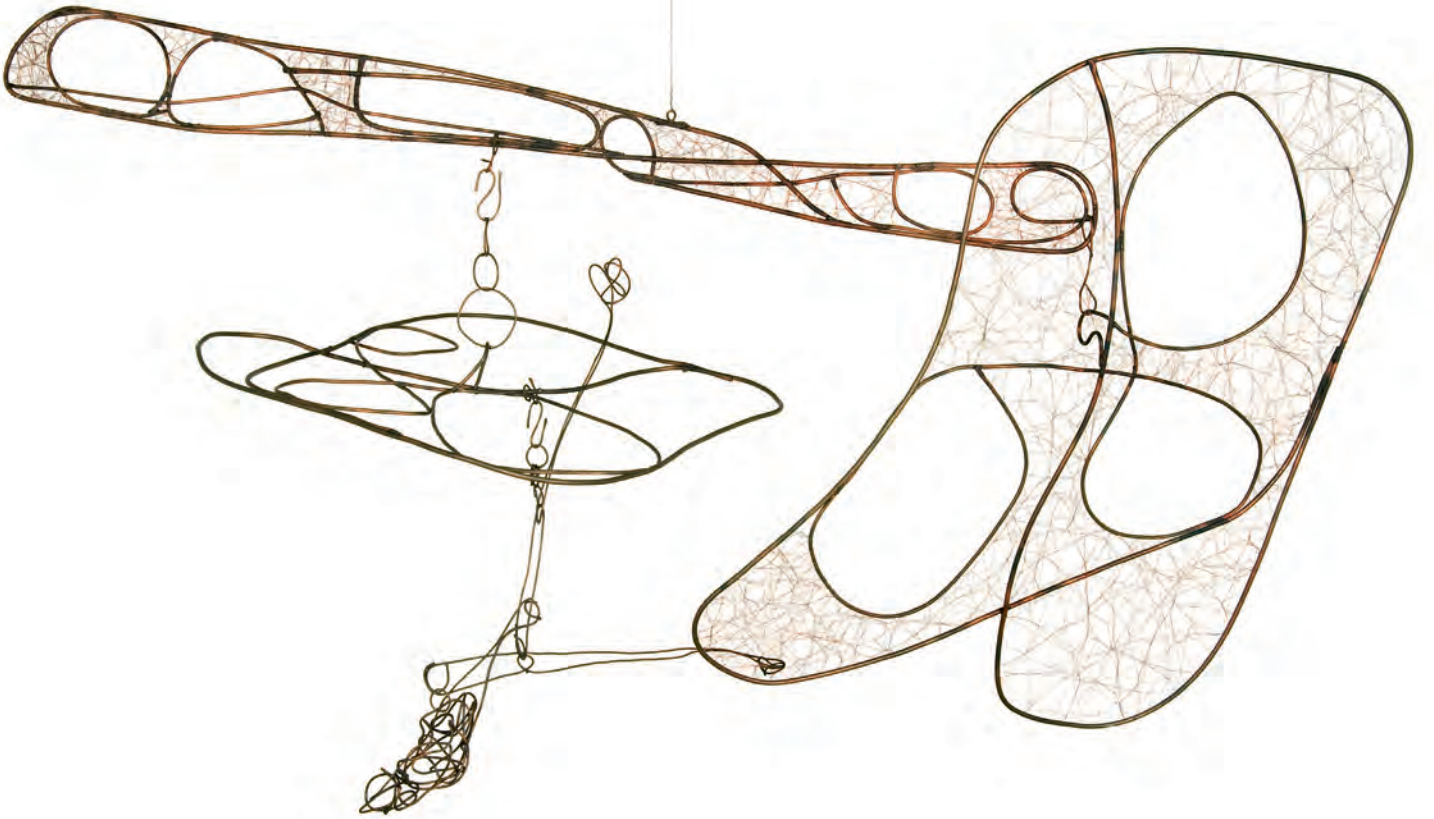
Pain, **1947. Mixed media on paper, 14 × 11 inches.**
OPPOSITE Interpenetration, **or** Three Shapes within a Structure, **1948. Enamel on plywood, 29 × 44 inches.**
Oakland Museum of California, Gift of The Falkenstein Foundation.

Barcelona #2, **1949. Gouache on paper on canvas, 39 × 25 inches.**

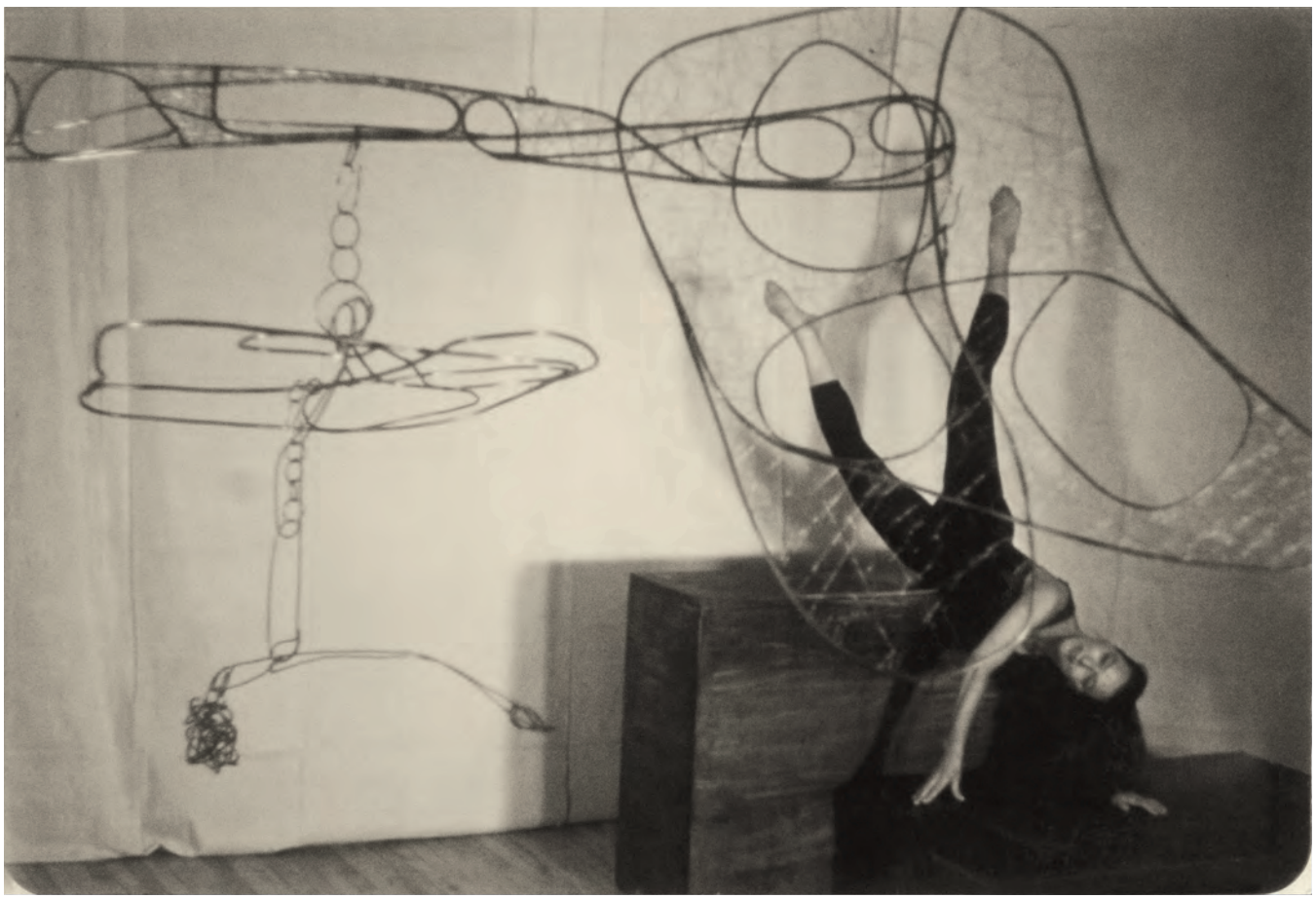
Untitled, **1950. Oil on wood, 55 × 56 × 3 inches.**

Untitled III, **1953. Etching, 18 × 15 inches.**

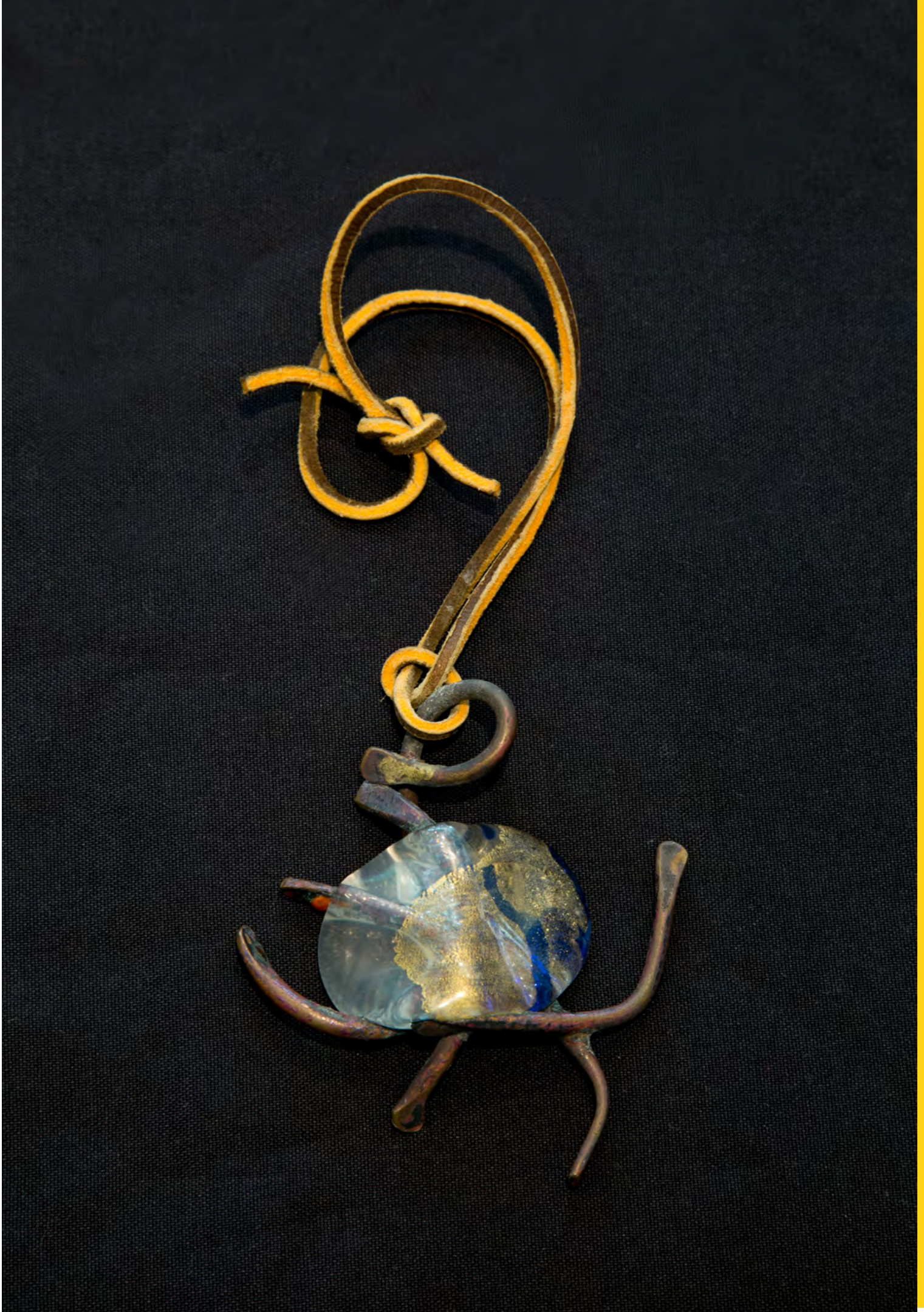
Sculptura Grafica, **1958. Wire and brazed metal attached to wood, 15 × 15 × 1 inches.**



Suspension, **1958. Copper tubing, copper wire; 49 × 96 ½ × 38 ½ inches.**
Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York.

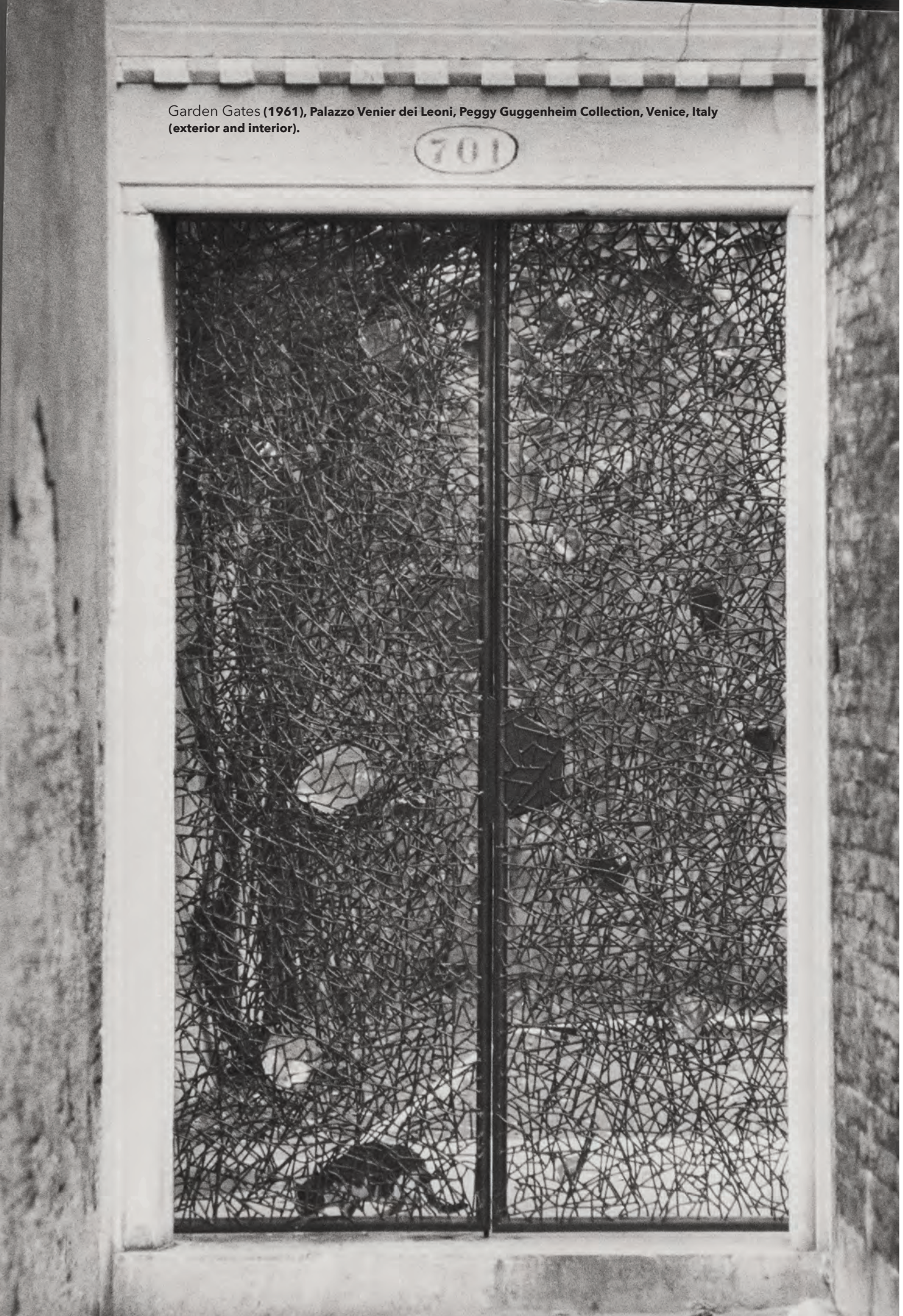


**The dancer May O'Donnell performing** Suspension **(1943) in the "stage decor" designed by Falkenstein (1958).**



Copper and Glass Brooch, **ca. 1960s. Copper, fused glass, leather strap; 3 ¾ × 3 ⅝ inches.** Private collection.

Moonstone Ring, **ca. 1960s. Gold-plated brass, moonstone; 1 ¾ × 1 inches.** Private collection.
OPPOSITE Silver Spiral Necklace, **ca. 1960s. Silver, 11 ⅜ × 5 ¼ inches.** Private collection.

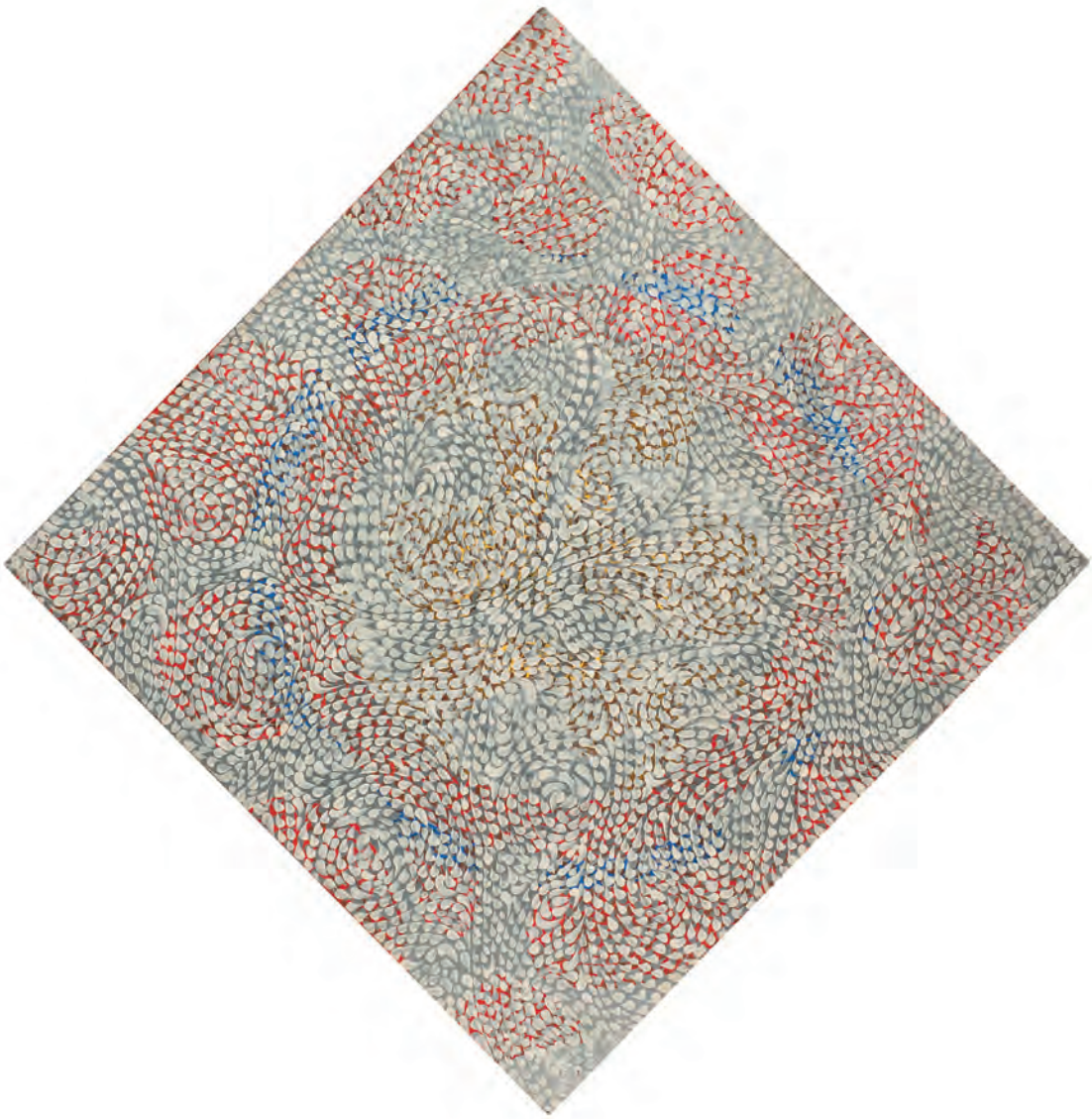



Garden Gates **(1961), Palazzo Venier dei Leoni, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, Italy (exterior and interior).**

Glass Painting #2, **1965. Steel, glass; 18 × 18 × 8 inches.**

Structure and Flow Fountain No. 3, **1968–72. Copper, fused Venetian glass; 14 × 22 × 22 feet. Long Beach Museum of Art, California.**

Basket, **1969. Copper, 34 × 46 × 34 inches.**



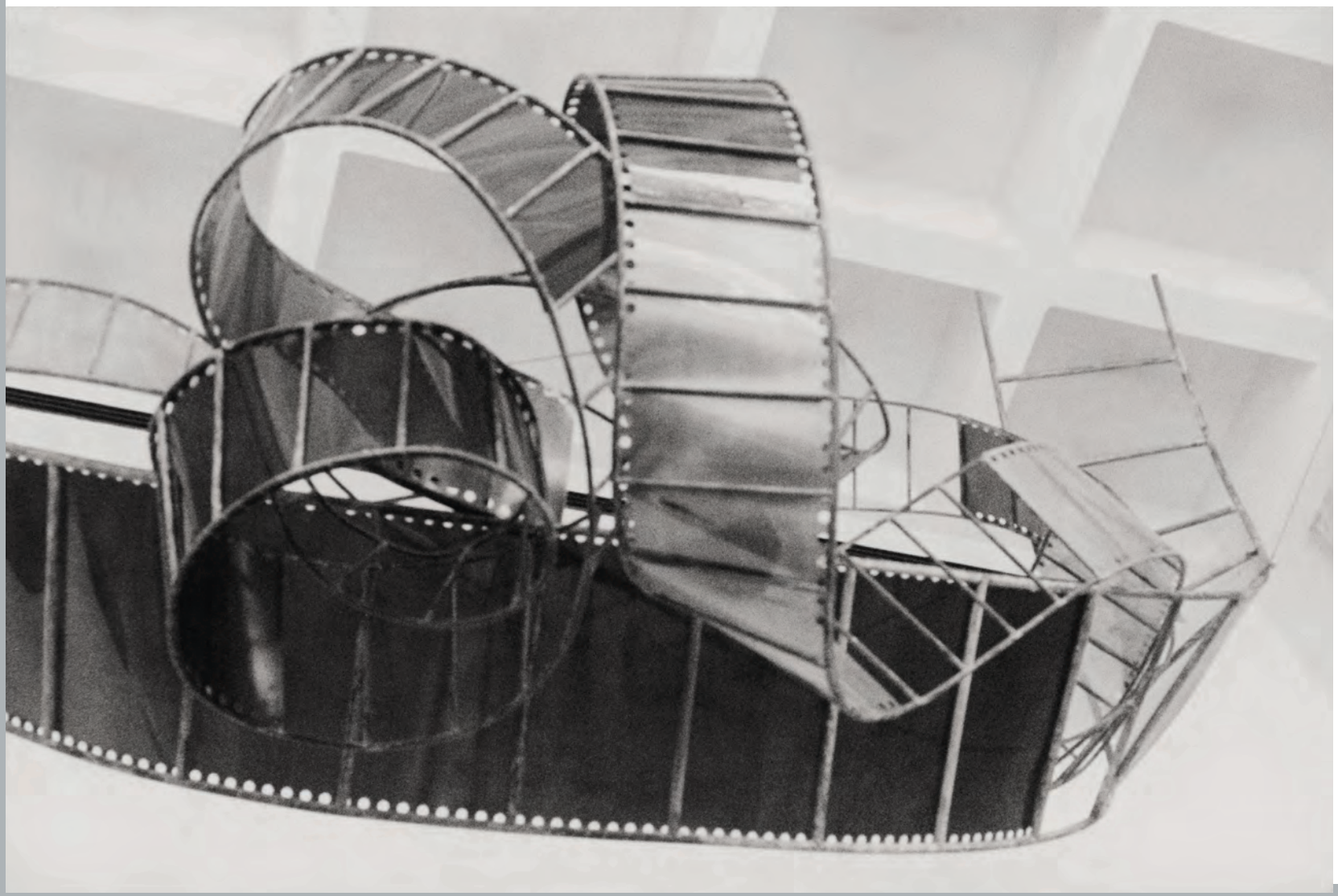
White Painting, **1969. Acrylic or oil on canvas, 48 × 48 inches.**

Topological Form #1, **1971. Stainless steel, epoxy paint; 16 × 15 × 12 inches.**

Untitled, **1971. Photolithograph and lithograph on Filicarta paper, 19 11/16 × 27 3/4 inches.**

Untitled, **1975. Chalk and gouache on green paper, 11 ½ × 17 ¼ inches.**

Montage/Section, **1976. Copper, Lexan sheets; 96 × 240 × 108 inches. Eileen Norris Cinema Theater, University of Southern California, Los Angeles (removed).**



Forum: Memorial for A. Quincy Jones, **1987. Port Orford cedar logs, 18 × 50 × 70 feet. California State University, Dominguez Hills (destroyed).**

Truss, **1978. Logs, forged tubing, paint; 63 × 47 × 18 inches.**

Untitled, **ca. 1980s. Resin with paint on burlap, 15 × 18 × 5 inches.**

**Peggy Guggenheim holding a sculpture by Claire Falkenstein, ca. 1960.**

## WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Self Portrait: Skeptical at Nineteen, **1927–28**
**Oil on canvas**
**28 ½ × 22 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Lumber Mill, **1938**
**Oil on canvas**
**26 × 36 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
Page 14

Crouching Figure, **1939**
**Ceramic, burnished oxides**
**8 ½ × 7 × 6 ½ inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Blue Figure, **1940**
**Carved and painted wood**
**30 ¾ × 9 × 9 inches**
Collection of Sandy and Adrea Bettelman, Los Angeles
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Vigilante Victim II, **1940**
**Carved and painted redwood**
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The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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**Terra-cotta with manganese dioxide**
**14 × 15 × 10 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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**15 ⅞ × 26 ¾ inches**
Collection of Jack and Mary Lou Rutberg
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**22 × 18 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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**Mahogany wood cut with band saw**
**Three pieces, 8 ¾ × 4 × 6 ¼ inches overall**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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**Gouache on paper**
**17 ¾ × 13 ¾ inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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**Oil on canvas**
**38 × 34 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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**Forged and painted iron**
**21 × 20 ¾ × 3 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Interpenetration, **1944**
**Wood, sisal rope**
**33 × 62 × 4 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Accident, **1945**
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**18 × 20 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Aerial**, 1947**
**Etched and airbrushed aluminum**
**32 × 29 × 7 ¼ inches**
Whitney Museum of American Art. Gift of The Falkenstein Foundation
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Fluids in Motion, **or** Circuit, **1947**
**Relief carving on Plexiglas in wood box with fluorescent light**
**33 ¼ × 45 × 5 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Pain, **1947**
**Mixed media on paper**
**14 × 11 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Wood and Brass Necklace with Obsidian, **ca. 1947**
**Wood, brass, obsidian**
**7 × 6 inches**
Private collection
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Interpenetration, **or** Three Shapes within a Structure, **1948**
**Enamel on plywood**
**29 × 44 inches**
Oakland Museum of California, Gift of The Falkenstein Foundation
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Barcelona #2, **1949**
**Gouache on paper on canvas**
**39 × 25 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Vase, **ca. 1950s**
**Blown glass with glass fusions**
**19 × 15 × 11 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Vase for 3, **ca. 1950s**
**Glass**
**16 × 13 × 11 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Leda #1, **or** Model, **1950**
**Stovepipe wire**
**14 × 13 × 9 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Untitled, **1950**
**Oil on wood**
**55 × 56 × 3 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Untitled III, **1953**
**Etching**
**18 × 15 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Continuum, **1956**
**Welded steel, tin wire**
**39⅛ × 20⅛ × 13¼ inches**
Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Structure and Flow, **ca. 1957–61**
**Copper tubing**
**26¾ × 36 × 24½ inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Sculptura Grafica, **1958**
**Wire and brazed metal attached to wood**
**15 × 15 × 1 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Suspension, **1958**
**Copper tubing, copper wire**
**49 × 96½ × 38½ inches**
Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Copper and Glass Brooch, **ca. 1960s**
**Copper, fused glass, leather strap**
**3¾ × 3⅝ inches**
Private collection
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Moonstone Ring, **ca. 1960s**
**Gold-plated brass, moonstone**
**1¾ × 1 inches**
Private collection
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Silver Spiral Necklace, **ca. 1960s**
**Silver**
**11⅜ × 5¼ inches**
Private collection
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**Copper**
**38½ × 75 × 30 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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The Sign, **or** Moving Points, **1961**
**Gouache and watercolor on paper**
**19 × 25 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Orbit the Earth, **1963**
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The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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**Shopping cart with painted wire and metal**
**70 × 36 × 89 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Struttura Grafica, **1964**
**11 relief intaglios on Fabriano Rosaspina paper**
**27½ × 19½ inches each**
**Published by Edizioni Giorgio Upiglio, Grafica Uno, Milan**
**Texts by Michel Tapié and Berto Morucchio**
**Cardboard portfolio covered in Fabrolen, with a copper relief by the artist**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Glass Painting #2, **1965**
**Steel, glass**
**18 × 18 × 8 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Point as a Set, **1965**
**Welded copper**
**34 × 34 × 34 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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La Brea (Moving Point Series), **1967**
**Acrylic or oil on canvas**
**72 × 60 inches**
Palm Springs Art Museum. Gift of The Falkenstein Foundation
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Basket, **1969**
**Copper**
**34 × 46 × 34 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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White Painting, **1969**
**Acrylic or oil on canvas**
**48 × 48 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Never Ending Screen, **1970s**
**Copper**
**19 × 19 × ¼ inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Moving Points in Silver, **1970**
**Acrylic on canvas**
**48 × 48 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Corona (Fusion), **1971**
**Brazed copper, fused glass**
**8 ¼ × 12 ¼ × 7 ½ inches**
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David K. Anderson, Martha Jackson Memorial Collection, 1981.109.8
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Topological Form #1, **1971**
**Stainless steel, epoxy paint**
**16 × 15 × 12 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Untitled, **1971**
**Photolithograph and lithograph on Filicarta paper**
**19 11/16 × 27 ¾ inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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**48 × 60 × 36 inches**
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**Chalk and gouache on green paper**
**11 ½ × 17 ¼ inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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**Color lithograph printed on both sides of paper**
**50 5/8 × 22 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Emblem I, **1978**
**Bamboo, linen canvas, paint, copper**
**107 × 106 × 19 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Space Structure, **or** Interpenetrating Triangles, **1978**
**Nickel-plated iron**
**47 × 35 × 25 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Truss, **1978**
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**63 × 47 × 18 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Untitled, **ca. 1980s**
**Resin with paint on burlap**
**15 × 18 × 5 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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Crash Landing, **1992**
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**78 × 54 inches**
Private collection
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Vortex, **1992**
**Acrylic and oil on canvas**
**23 × 30 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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**72 × 108 inches**
The Falkenstein Foundation, courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York
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**Photograph of the dancer May O'Donnell performing** Suspension **(1943) in the "stage decor" designed by Falkenstein (1958)**
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**Structures drawings, after 1960; reproduction of original ink-on-paper drawing**
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**Photograph of Peggy Guggenheim holding a sculpture by Claire Falkenstein, ca. 1960**
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**Photograph of** Sun Ribbon **(1982), Court, New Town Center, South Coast Plaza, Costa Mesa, California (altered)**
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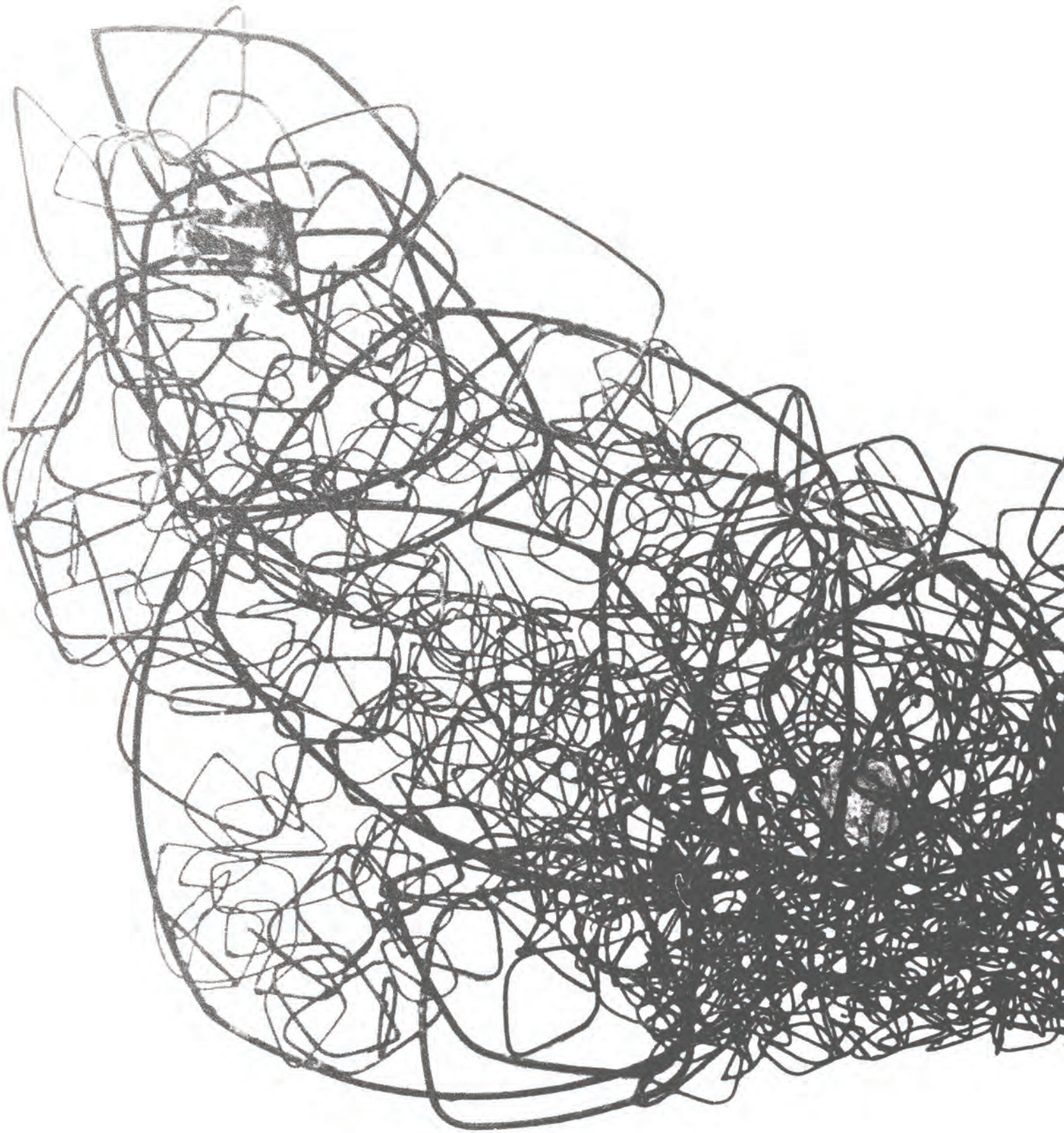
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